

# 12

## Mahā Sudassana Sutta

The Discourse on Mahā Sudassana | D 17

Theme: A mythology of meditation

Translated by Piya Tan ©2008

### 1 Sutta summary and highlight

#### 1.1 MEDITATION AND MYTHOLOGY

**1.1.1 Mythology of meditation.** Despite its lateness, the Mahā Sudassana Sutta is an interesting and important text relating to Buddhist meditation and mythology; indeed, it is a mythology of meditation, and a meditation on mythology. As a mythology of meditation, it is about Mahā Sudassana, a “head-anointed kshatriya rajah” [§1.3.2] who, on account of his moral virtue, becomes a “wheel-turner,” a universal monarch [§1.7.3], blessed with a rich country and great royal city, Kusā, vātī [§1.3.2-1.6.4].

Despite his powers, wealth and pleasures, indeed *because* of them, the king, in due course, performs charitable acts [§1.23.4], builds a meditation complex [§2.2], and goes into meditation retreat [§§2.3-4]. When he passes away peacefully, he is reborn in the brahma world [§2.13].

**1.1.2 Meditation on mythology.** As a meditation on mythology, the Mahā Sudassana Sutta helps us reflect on the nature of language and narrative, and how they are used in raising our consciousness to a deeper level and broader vision of the Dharma. Although the Dharma is “perfect in the letter” (*sa, vyañjana*), this perfection is only as far as words can convey. The Dharma is also “perfect in the spirit” (*s’attha*), that is to say, if we look deep enough into the stillness of our heart, we will see its true meaning and taste joyful freedom. As such, the Buddha would often teach the Dharma both on the *story* level and on the *truth* level.<sup>1</sup>

**1.1.3 Grounds for merit-making.** An ancient root of the wheel-turner ideal, found in **the Mā Puñña Bhāyī Sutta** (It 1.3.2) relates how the Buddha declares that through cultivating merit—that is, through the three grounds for merit-making (*puñña, kiriya, vatthu*)—he has attained numerous heavenly births as Sakra, as Brahmā, and on earth, “many hundred times,” as a wheel-turner. The Sutta specifically identifies the supporting karma for this as those of “giving, taming, restraint” (*dāna dama saññama*),<sup>2</sup> also mentioned in §2.1. This triad alludes to three “grounds for merit” (*puñña, kiriya vatthu*): giving (*dāna*), moral virtue (*sīla*), and mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*).<sup>3</sup>

**1.2 THE SUTTA’S BACKGROUND.** **The Mahā Sudassana Sutta** (D 17) is closely connected with **the Mahā, parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), which gives the fullest account of the Buddha’s final days.<sup>4</sup> However, many of its episodes and sections—about two-thirds of the Sutta—are found elsewhere in the Canon.<sup>5</sup> The two discourses following it in the Dīgha—**the Mahā Sudassana Sutta** (D 17) and **the Jana, vasabha Sutta** (D 18)<sup>6</sup>—give detailed accounts of related events. The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta only briefly states the Buddha’s reason for choosing Kusinārā, a “remote jungle township,” to spend his last days, that is, it was the capital of a great wheel-turning king, Sudassana [§5.17-18]. His story is told in fabulous detail in the Mahā Sudassana Sutta, which apparently is meant for the laity, as it speaks of the king’s greatness as being due to charity (*dāna*), self-taming (*dama*), and sense-restraint (*samyama*) [§2.1; 1.1.3].

Dhammapāla, in his **Param’attha, dīpanī I**, the Udāna Commentary, gives three reasons why the Buddha decides to pass away at Kusinārā, that is,

<sup>1</sup> See further **Dhammapada 97**, SD 10.6.

<sup>2</sup> It 22/2.3.1/14-16 & SD 2.11b (2.2).

<sup>3</sup> **D 33**, 1.10(3)/3:218; **A 8.36**/4:241-341 @ SD 22.17; **It 3.2.1**/51 @ SD 22.17(2.1).

<sup>4</sup> D 16/2:72-168 @ SD 9.

<sup>5</sup> See SD 9 (3).

<sup>6</sup> D 18/2:200-219 @ SD 62.3. Like Mahā Sudassana S (D 17), a brief statement in Mahā, parinibbāna S (D 16) is elaborated as separate full-blown sutta.

- (1) It would be the occasion for the teaching of the Mahā Sudassana Sutta (D 17), where “I shall be able to teach on what I have accomplished in the human world of men to just like that experienced in the deva world, hearing which the masses would see it as something wholesome to be practised.” (D 16,5.17-18/2:146)
- (2) The wanderer Subhadda would approach the Buddha and question him, go for refuge and go forth to become an arhat. (D 16,5.24-28/2:150 f)
- (3) If he were to attain parinirvana elsewhere, there would be bloodshed over the relic distribution, but at Kusināra, the brahmin Doṇa would prevent this by dividing up the relics. (D 16.6.25/2:166) (UA 402)

**1.3 SUMMARY OF THE SUTTA.** The Mahā Sudassana Sutta opens with the famous Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta episode where Ānanda beseeches the Buddha not to pass away in an insignificant remote village of Kusināra. The Buddha however tells him that Kusināra is a fabulous ancient city of great significance in the time of the wheel-turning king Mahā Sudassana [§1.1-3]. The king’s glory and majesty are celebrated in the description of his royal city of Kusā,vātī [§§1.3-6], the details of his 7 jewels [§§1.7-17], and his four charismatic qualities [§§1.18-21].

He goes on to build fabulous lotus lakes in the gardens of Kusā,vātī, making them freely available to the people [§1.22], replete with spa attendants, and he performs public charity on their shore. He gives away living necessities (food and clothing), vehicles, beddings, and money to the public, depending on their needs [§1.23]. Interestingly, and not mentioned anywhere else, the king also gives away women to men seeking marriage-partners: one of history’s earliest matching service! [§1.23.4]

When his wealthy subjects offer him a great donation, he, like the ancient king Velāma,<sup>7</sup> rejects it, claiming that he has sufficient wealth from his just taxes. So they build him a palace with the donations [§1.24]. Even the gods intervene and construct the Dharma palace [§1.25], which is a veritable heaven on earth [§1.26], replete with a palm grove [§1.27], railings [§1.28] and musical bells [§1.29]. It is a dazzling palace, almost a blinding mirage [§1.30].

The fabulous Dharma lotus lake opposite the Dharma palace is as big as the palace itself [§1.31], with palm trees of precious materials and musical bells, too [§1.32]. On the completion of the Dharma palace and the Dharma lotus lake, the king makes offerings to worthy recluses and brahmins [§33].

Reflecting on how all his glory and majesty have come about, he knows them as his own karmic fruits of charity, self-taming and sense-restraint [§2.1]. He enters the pinnacled hall of great dispelling to begin his meditation retreat [§2.2], attains the four dhyanas [§2.3], and goes on to cultivate the four immeasurables (the divine abodes) [§2.4]. Now, the king has 14 sets of 84,000 precious possessions, including humans and animals [§2.5], and he treats them kindly [§2.6].

The queen misses the king, who has been on retreat for many thousand years (the people have very long lives then), and decides to go with her entourage to see him [§2.7]. The king is mindfully restrained when he sees her [§2.8], and meets her in the open of the palm grove [§2.9]. The queen, noticing the king’s bodily radiance, deduces his impending death, and urges him to arouse his will to live by thinking of his fabulous possessions [§2.10]. The king instead instructs the queen to assist him in dying joyfully so that he dies a good death by letting go of any thought of those possessions [§2.11,] and the queen tearfully complies [§2.12]. The king then passes away and is reborn in the brahma world [§2.13].

The Buddha declares that he himself is Mahā Sudassana in that past life, enjoying all those fabulous possessions [§2.14], but he does so in a frugal manner [§2.15]. Yet, he, too, must pass away: all conditioned things are impermanent! [§2.16]. However, the Buddha also declares that this is his last death, with no more rebirth [§2.17].

<sup>7</sup> Velāma S (A 9.20/4:392-396), SD 16.6.

## 2 The Sutta and its significance

### 2.1 THE MAHĀ SUDASSANA SUTTA AND INTERTEXTUALITY<sup>8</sup>

**2.1.1 Mahā Sudassana Sutta & Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta: Similarities.** The Mahā Sudassana Sutta is preserved in the Pali canon as an independent discourse in the Dīgha Nikāya (D 17). Its “origin-story” (*nidāna*), however, clearly alludes to the episode of the Buddha lying on his parinirvana-bed at Kusi,nārā [§§1.1-1.3.4], as related in the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta (D 16).<sup>9</sup> What is briefly stated in D 16 is treated here as a full-length sutta in D 17. The sequential placement in the Dīgha also suggests their close connection. The Mahā Sudassana Sutta, in other words, is a full-length treatment of the brief statement about king Mahā Sudassana and Kusā,vātī in D 16.

German Indologist and archaeologist **Ernst Waldschmidt** points out that the Mahā Sudassana narrative should be seen as integral to the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, as it is common to all versions of the texts. This suggests that the Mahā Sudassana narrative dates from a time before the division of the early sangha into clearly defined sects, that is, the 3<sup>rd</sup> or even the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Waldschmidt, however, is nevertheless troubled by this conclusion, since the mythic content and style of the Mahā Sudassana narrative is similar to those of later descriptions of the Buddhist heavens.<sup>10</sup>

However, as **Rupert Gethin** notes, “the mythic and exaggerated numbers” were not alien motifs even in pre-Buddhist texts or in early Buddhist literature (2006:83 f). After all, mythical language is a vital and effective way of expressing experiential Dharma that relates to mental states, emotions and latent tendencies, in short, human nature and the the nature of life.<sup>11</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup>-century French Buddhologist, **Andre Bareau**, has earlier on suggested that we should see the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta episode, where Ānanda questions the Buddha about the appropriateness of his dying in Kusi,nārā, as being *primary* in the evolution of the mahāparinirvana narrative, and that the Mahā Sudassana narrative is a *secondary* development (1971:76). In other words, following Bareau, the mahāparinirvana narrative came first, and from it arose the Mahā Sudassana narrative.

As **Gethin** points out, however, Bareau’s view is “inadequate as an explanation of the full Mahāsu-dassana narrative as it has come down to us: for example, thirty pages in the PTS edition of the Pāli text, and twenty pages in Matsumura’s edition of the Sanskrit text” (2006:77 f). In other words, from narrative development alone, we cannot surmise the dates of the two texts, especially which is the older one.

Indeed, only the Pali version of Mahā Sudassana narrative exists *independently*, while in the non-Pali versions, the narrative is always *embedded* in the Mahā,parinirvāṇa account. The separate existence of the Pali narrative, relative to the other versions (with the embedded Mahā Sudassana narrative), however, suggests otherwise: that the Pali Mahā Sudassana Sutta is a *later* development.

**2.1.2 Mahā Sudassana Sutta & Sanskrit versions: Differences.** Nevertheless, both the **Pali** narrative and its **non-Pali** versions all show a close connection with the Mahā,parinirvāṇa episode: they all relate a deathbed scene. Just as the Buddha, in his last moments, lies lionwise between the twin sal trees,<sup>12</sup> Mahā Sudassana, too, lies likewise. Just the Buddha speaks with Ānanda, so does Mahā Sudassana speak with queen Subhaddā [§§2.8-12]: both the Buddha and Mahā Sudassana speak while lying lionwise on their respective deathbeds. In the Sanskrit version, however, Mahā Sudassana is depicted as sitting on a golden seat before talking to the queen.<sup>13</sup>

The Mahā Sudassana Sutta relates how queen Subhaddā, on seeing how “exceedingly pure and clear his complexion is (*parisuddho chavi,vaṇṇo pariyodāto*)” concludes that he is dying [§2.10.1]. Similarly,

<sup>8</sup> “Intertextuality” has 2 important senses: (1) the need for one text to be read in the light of its allusions to and differences from the content or structure of other texts, and (2) the (allusive) relationship between esp literary texts (OED). Both senses apply here.

<sup>9</sup> D 16,5.17-18/2:146 f @ SD 9.

<sup>10</sup> 1944-48 1:4, 2:205, 341.

<sup>11</sup> For a special study, see **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1.

<sup>12</sup> D 16,5.1/2:137,16 @ SD 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Sauvarṇe bhadrasane niṣaṇṇaḥ*. Matsumura 1988:37,1; Waldschmidt 1951:342.

in the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta, Ānanda notices, in identical terms, “how exceedingly pure and clear” the Buddha’s complexion is. The Buddha then tells Ānanda that he (the Buddha) will die that same night.<sup>14</sup>

In the **Sanskrit** version, however, the king, on seeing the queen, lowers his eyes so that he does not see the finely-dressed harem women present. The queen beseeches him not to be so unfeeling towards them.<sup>15</sup> In the Pali version, Mahā Sudassana instructs queen Subhaddā that he wishes to die without any longing, an important notion reflected in a number of suttas.<sup>16</sup> In the Sanskrit version, however, the king’s instructions are more general, without any reference to his imminent death. While in the Pali version, the king dies soon after conversing with the queen [§2.13], in the Sanskrit version, he returns to the Dharma palace to practise the divine abodes. We are then told that as a result of the king’s sustained meditation (*tad, bahula, vihārī*), he is reborn in the brahma world.<sup>17</sup>

From all this, we can see that while the Mahā Sudassana Sutta is closely linked with the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta, the Sanskrit version is less connected with the the Buddha’s passing away. Yet, it is embedded in the Sanskrit version of the Mahā,parinirvāṇa Sūtra. The question that arises here is:

- (1) was the Mahā Sudassana narrative originally separate but later *incorporated* into the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta, or
- (2) was it originally a minor episode in the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta that gradually *grew* into an independent text?

**2.2 AN INDEPENDENT NARRATIVE.** Before we can answer this question [2.1.2], we need to understand that **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) is a composite work that underwent a gradual growth. British Pali pioneer, **T W Rhys Davids** even pointed out that some two-thirds of the Sutta is found elsewhere in the Nikāyas (D:RD 2:71 f). In other words, there is little original material in it.<sup>18</sup>

**Gethin** thinks that the Mahā Sudassana Sutta probably developed as an independent narrative, but is always associated with the Buddha’s parinirvana through the name Kusā, vātī. This is indicated by the fact that the Pali Dīgha Nikāya and the Chinese Madhyama Āgama preserve an independent text, “and by the fact that, even while being incorporated in [the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta], the CA/Gil<sup>19</sup> version of [the Mahā Sudassana Sutta]...remains less integrated with the [mahaparinirvana] narrative framework in comparison to the Pāli version.” (2006:81).

Another piece of “internal” evidence showing that the Mahā Sudassana narrative is *an independent work* is found in the Gilgit manuscript of the Bhaiṣajya, vastu (chapter on medicines) of the Mūla, sarvāsativādin Vinaya, which refers to “the Mahāsudarśana Sūtra in the Dīrghāgama in the section of the six sūtras” for the full text.<sup>20</sup> This shows that even though the narrative is always presented as embedded in the non-Pali versions, it still retains the character of an independent sutra.<sup>21</sup>

Intertextually, that the Mahā Sudarśana narrative is an independent text outside of the Pali tradition is further confirmed by the Gilgit manuscript of the Sanskrit **Mahā, sudarśanāvadāna** and an individual Chinese **Madhyama Āgama** translation of the Mahā Sudarśana Sūtra.<sup>22</sup> The Mahā Sudassana narrative not only serves as an elaboration of the Buddha’s conversation with Ānanda on the significance of Kusī, -nārā, as briefly recorded the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta, but is also an important narrative in its own right.

**2.3 LATENESS OF THE MAHĀ SUDASSANA SUTTA.** If it were true that the Mahā Sudassana narrative had developed independently [2.2], then, argues **Gethin**, “the Pali version might be seen as representing a relatively advanced stage in so far as elements in its narrative seem to have been deliberately developed as counterpoints to the narrative of the Buddha’s death” (2006:82). It is probable that, just as the Pali re-

<sup>14</sup> D 16,4.37/2:133 f @ SD 9.

<sup>15</sup> Waldschmidt 1951:342; Matsumura 1988:35,5-37,2.

<sup>16</sup> See esp **Nakula S** (A 6.16/3:295-298) & SD 5.2 (2.2) for other related suttas.

<sup>17</sup> Matsumura 1988:42-45.

<sup>18</sup> See **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16) @ SD 9 (3).

<sup>19</sup> The Central Asian/Gilgit (Skt) version ed Matsumura, 1988.

<sup>20</sup> *Vistareṇa mahāsudarśanasūtram dīrghāgame ṣaṣṭisūtrikanipāte* (Matsumura 1988:131,6 f).

<sup>21</sup> Cf Matsumura 1988:xxxiv; Gethin 2006:82.

<sup>22</sup> T26 = T1.515b3-518c3; cf Matsumura 1988:xv, xxxi.

citers had adopted the idea of the 32 superhuman marks from the Sarvāstivāda,<sup>23</sup> they adopted the Mahā Sudassana story, but retained it as an independent work. We could also surmise here that there might have existed an older independent version, which the common ancestor (an urtext) to both the Sanskrit and the Pali versions.

That the Pali narrative is a late or more developed work is further indicated by its following features, in comparison to the Sanskrit parallels, such as

- the 7 precious things [eg §1.4] rather than only 4; and
- the king has 14 sets of possessions, rather than only 6, each totalling 84,000 [eg §2.5].

However, it should also be noted that there are *additions* in the Sanskrit version, too:

- the city of Kusā,vātī is surrounded by 7 moats, besides the 7 walls (Matsumura 1988:3,9-11); and
- the city is filled with 12 sounds rather than only 10 [§1.3.4 & Matsumura 1988:7,11-15].<sup>24</sup>

In conclusion, we can say that the Mahā Sudassana narrative—both the Pali and the Sanskrit versions—are late works. This is merely a historical analysis, which in no way devalues its significance. Even as they are, the Mahā Sudassana narrative, especially as the Mahā Sudassana Sutta, is a vital text that gives us a better understanding of the development of meditation [5], the rise of visualization [6], and the roots of the Sukhāvātī or Pure Land teachings, as we shall see [6.4].

## 2.4 VERSIONS OF THE MAHĀ SUDASSANA SUTTA

**2.4.1 Āgama versions.** The Madhy'āgama has a Chinese version of the **Mahā Sudarśana Sūtra** 大善見王經 *Dà shànjiàn wáng jīng*.<sup>25</sup> There is a relatively full account of Mahā Sudassana is given in 大智度論 *Dà zhìdù lùn*, the Chinese version of the \*Mahā,prajñā,pāramitā Śāstrōpadeśa (the Commentary to the Great Perfection of Wisdom Treatise), traditionally attributed to Nagārjuna.<sup>26</sup>

Matsumura concludes that the often verbatim coincidence between the Mahā,sudarśana narrative embedded in the Central Asian manuscript of the Mahā,parinirvāṇa Sūtra and the Gilgit manuscript of the Mahā,sudarśan'āvadāna means that they are essentially identical (1988:viii f).<sup>27</sup>

**2.4.2 Embedded versions.** The close connection between the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) and the Mahā Sudassana Sutta (D 17) is attested by the various versions of the Mahā,parinirvāṇa Sūtra preserved in Buddhist Sanskrit and in Chinese translations. However, while only the Pali version exists as a separate Mahā Sudassana Sutta, all the non-Pali texts have the full Mahā Sudarśana narrative embedded within the Mahā,parinirvāṇa Sūtra.<sup>28</sup>

There are at least seven versions of the **Mahā,parinirvāṇa Sūtra**, which are embedded with the Mahā Sudarśana narrative, namely:<sup>29</sup>

- (1) A Chinese Dīrgh'āgama translation (遊行經 DĀ 2 = T1.1/1.21b15-24b18),
- (2) An individual Chinese translation (佛般泥洹經 T1.5/1.169c-171a25),
- (3) An individual Chinese translation (般泥洹經 T1.6/1.185c03-186c12),
- (4) An individual Chinese translation (大般涅槃經 T1.7/1.201a4-230a20)
- (5) A Central Asian Sanskrit version, ed Ernst Waldschmidt, 1950-51,
- (6) A Sanskrit version, ed Hisashi Matsumura, 1988 (20 pages).
- (7) A Dīrgh'āgama version in Sanskrit, ed Jens-Uwe Hartmann, 1994.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30), SD 36.9 (4.2.4.2).

<sup>24</sup> Cf Gethin 2006:83, where he gives a third “addition”—that of the “Dharma Palm Grove”—which however is also found in the Pali version [§§1.2.7, 2.9].

<sup>25</sup> MĀ 68 = T1.26.515b3-518c3.

<sup>26</sup> See Lamotte 1949:763-766. The asterisk (\*) before the title means that it is a reconstructed Skt title back-translated from the Chinese (or non-Skt) name.

<sup>27</sup> For a comparison of the Pali version and the Central Asian/Gilgit version of the Mahā Sudassana narrative, see Gethin 2006:71-77.

<sup>28</sup> Bureau 1970-71 2:76.

<sup>29</sup> On these and other sources of **Maha,parinibbāna S** (D 16), see SD 9(4b).

<sup>30</sup> Sūtra 6 of the \*Ṣaṭ,sūtraka,nipāta (“The Six Sūtra Collection”): 2004:121. The name is not preserved in the MS, but know from a quotation, cf Hartmann 1980:140 & Hartmann 1994:328 & n10.



**2.5 RELATED SUTTAS AND TEXTS.** Although the Mahā Sudassana narrative is often closely associated with the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta (D 16), as a Jātaka by the Buddha explaining why he chooses to die in remote Kusī,nārā (Kusā,vātī of Mahā Sudassana) [§§1.2-13], there are evidence that the narrative, in part or in full, has come down to us, or alluded to in a number of other contexts.<sup>31</sup>

In the Pali tradition, the narrative is given (mostly in summary, often with variations) or referred to in the following texts:

- **Cakka,vatti Sutta** S 46.42/5:99 the Buddha gives us the 7 awakening-factors;
- **Go,maya Sutta** S 22.96/3:144-147 as a parable for reflecting on impermanence;
- **Culla Niddesa** Nc:Be 164 by title only, as being given by the Buddha;<sup>32</sup>
- **Mahā Sudassana Jātaka** J 95/1:391-393 a very brief account with variations; and
- **Mahā Sudassana Cariya** C 1.4/28-36/3 f a brief account detailing his charity.

As already mentioned, a relatively full account of Mahā Sudassana is given in 大智度論 *Dà zhìdù lùn* [2.4].

The Mahā Sudassana narrative is important as an independent text because it has clear connections with other Indian Buddhist texts, as attested by the following points:

- the descriptions of cities in **the Mahā,vastu** and **the Divyāvādāna**,<sup>33</sup>
- the description of heavenly mansions (*vimāna*) in **the Vimāna Vatthu** and its commentary,<sup>34</sup> and
- the description of Amitābha's<sup>35</sup> Pure Land in **the Sukhā.vati,vyūha Sūtra**.<sup>36</sup>

Scholars like Waldschmidt and Matsumura have further listed various sources related to the study of the Mahā Sudassana narrative.<sup>37</sup>

Another interesting related discourse is **the Satta Suriya Sutta** (A 7.62), which, although not about meditation, is about an accomplished teacher, Sunetta, whose many heavenly and good rebirths includes being reborn “many hundreds of times” as a wheel-turner. Yet, declares the Buddha, “although the teacher Sunetta has such a long life, lasting for so long, he was not liberated (from suffering).” That is, until he has understood the “four truths” of noble moral virtue, noble mental concentration, noble wisdom, and noble liberation.<sup>38</sup>

**2.6 BABYLONIAN ORIGINS?** We have noted in our studies of a few suttas<sup>39</sup> how Mesopotamia, especially Babylonian culture, might have influenced Buddhist narratives and figures. The Buddhist reciters, for example, attributed the tradition of the 32 marks to “the brahmins.” However, no such tradition could be found in any pre-Buddhist or contemporary brahminical work of the Buddha's time. It is possible that “brahmins” here refers to the ancient Babylonian priests.

The 32 marks are closely connected with the idea that the Buddha is a “great man” who has to choose between worldly dominion and the death-free state. This choice, however, seemed to have been expressed

<sup>31</sup> On the significance of the Sutta, see the detailed and instructive study by Rupert Gethin 2006; here see p69.

<sup>32</sup> *Bhagavā...mahā,sudassaniya,suttantaṃ bhāsanto attano ca paresaṇ ca atītaṃ ādisati.*

<sup>33</sup> Waldschmidt lists descriptions of the foll cities and buildings: Sudarśana, the city of the Thirty-three gods, and Sudharma, the assembly-hall of the gods (Divy 220-222), Bhadra,silā in Uttarā,patha (Divy 315),Dīpa,vātī, the city of king Arcimat, the Buddha Dīpaṅkara's father (Mvst 1:194-196), Uttara, the ciyt of the Buddha Maṅgala (Mvst 1:249) (1950-51:305). See also Gethin 2006:70 n20, 72 n32.

<sup>34</sup> See Collins 1998:311-314, 478.

<sup>35</sup> On defs & refs regarding Amitābha, see [Digital Dictionary of Buddhism website](#) (password: “guest”).

<sup>36</sup> In Chin, known as 無量壽經 *wúliángshòu jīng* or Amit'āyuh Sūtra: see [Digital Dictionary of Buddhism website](#) (password: “guest”).. See Gethin 2006:93-102.

<sup>37</sup> A list of available textual sources for the study of the Mahā,sudarśana narrative is found in Matsumura's intro to his ed of the Gilgit *Mahāsudarśanāvādāna*, and rev ed of Waldschmidt's Central Asian texts (Matsumura 1988:xii-xvii). See further Gethin 2006:69 n19.

<sup>38</sup> A 7.52/4:100-106 @ SD 47.8.

<sup>39</sup> See **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30/3:142-179) & SD 36.9 (3.3.1). Other Buddhist myths and images linked with Mesopotamia incl Bāvarī (see **Lakkhaṇa S**, D 30 @ 36.9 (3.3.1)) & the figure of the land-sighting bird (**Kevaḍḍha S**, D 11.85/1:222 @ SD 1.7).

in pre-Buddhist times and outside of India, that is, in the Mesopotamian myth of Gilgamesh and the bull-man Enkidu, the most famous myth of Mesopotamia, some 2000 years before the Buddha's time.

Mesopotamian influence on the Mahā Sudassana story was proposed by Polish-French Buddhologist **Jean Przyluski**, citing how Herodotus, in his *Histories*, describes Ecbatana (or Abgatana) (modern Hamadan, Iran), the ancient city of the Medes:

[T]he city now known as Ecbatana was built, a place of great size and strength fortified by concentric walls, these so placed that each successive circle was higher than the one below it by the height of the battlements... The circles are seven in number and the innermost contains the royal palace and treasury... The battlements of the five outer rings are painted in different colours, the first white, the second black, the third crimson, the fourth blue, the fifth orange; the battlements of the two inner rings are plated with silver and gold respectively.

(*Histories* 1.98, tr de Sélincourt & Burn, 1972:82)

The parallel is clearly striking, yet, as **Gethin** notes, “even if we accept such an account as a source of the conception of Kusāvātī, this will not help with the question of what a text such as the [Mahā Sudassana Sutta] meant to those who actually composed it and used it.” (2006:85). Religious texts are notoriously plagiaristic, and often such texts and teachings are reinterpreted to the religion's purposes. The early Buddhist texts often lifted passages or stories from brahminical and other religious texts, turning them on their heads, refuting them as wrong views and practices.<sup>40</sup>

The purpose of the Mahā Sudassana narrative, as we shall see [3-4], is far nobler than merely knocking down the teachings of others. But let us examine the most obvious points first, and then go on to what is less obvious, and yet of even greater significance, following that. We will now examine the 7 jewels of the wheel-turner [3], then see how the Sutta is related to the 3 trainings [4], focussing on meditation [5], and finally visualization [6], including how it might be an early precursor to the Mahāyāna conception of Sukhāvātī [6.4].

### 3 The wheel-turner's 7 jewels

**3.0 THE SEVEN JEWELS AS A SET.** At first glance, it is clear that the Mahā Sudassana narrative is a story of a wheel-turning king (*cakka, vatti rāja*). The Mahā Sudassana Sutta (D 17) is, in fact, one of the discourses that deals with the wheel-turner,<sup>41</sup> one endowed with the 7 jewels (*satta ratana*), and it is the Mahā Sudassana Sutta that gives the fullest description of them [§§1.7-17].

The 7 jewels (*satta, ratana*)—the wheel jewel, the elephant jewel, the horse jewel, the gem-jewel, the woman jewel, the steward jewel, and the commander jewel<sup>42</sup>—are the regalia and hallmarks of the wheel-turner or universal monarch (*cakka, vatti*).<sup>43</sup> **The Iti, vuttaka Commentary** links the jewels together showing how they function as a set. While he conquers through the wheel jewel, he roams about his realm easily on the elephant jewel, watches over it with the help of his steward jewel, and experiences bliss with the rest of the jewels.

<sup>40</sup> See further **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30) @ SD 36.9 (3.3.1).

<sup>41</sup> Discourses dealing with the wheel-turner (*cakka, vatti*) incl: **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17/2:169-199), SD 36.12; **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26/3:58-79), SD 36.10; **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30/3:58-79), SD 36.10; **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129/) =SD 2.22; **Cakka, vatti Acchariya S** (A 4.130/2:133), SD 36.10 (2.1.2). This section suggests that the wheel-turner has great charisma, on which see Piyasilo, *Charisma in Buddhism*, 1992h. On Buddhist kingship, see SD 36.10 (5.4.1).

<sup>42</sup> Respectively, *cakka, ratana*, *hatthi, ratana*, *assa, ratana*, *maṇi, ratana*, *itthī, ratana*, *gaha, pati, ratana*, and *pariṇāyaka, ratana*.

<sup>43</sup> See **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129), for details of the 7 jewels, foll by the 4 blessings of beauty, longevity, excellent health and great charisma (M 129.34-47/3:172-177), SD 2.22. They are fully expl in **Param'attha, jotika** vol 1, Comy to the Khuddaka, pāṭha (the first book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, but a late compilation), commenting on the **Ratana S** (Kh 6) (KhpA 170-174): for tr, see KhpA:Ñ 185-188. See also Chakravarti 1987:152-158.

Through the first, the wheel jewel, the wheel-turner fulfills his power of endeavour (*ussāha*); through the last, the commander jewel, he fully benefits from his good counsel (or wisdom) (*manta*).<sup>44</sup> Through the elephant jewel, the horse jewel and the commander jewel, he is accomplished in the power of overlordship (*pabhū*).<sup>45</sup> Through the woman jewel and the wheel jewel, he enjoys the fruits of these threefold powers. Through these two jewels, he enjoys the bliss of wealth (*bhoga,sukha*), and through the rest, the bliss of sovereignty (*issariya,sukha*). The first three come about for him by the virtue of his good karma rooted in non-hate; the middle three, through the wholesome root of non-greed; and the last through the wholesome root of non-delusion. (ItA 77)

**The Khuddaka Pāṭha Commentary**, commenting on the Ratana Sutta (Khp 6) says that when the wheel-turner's wheel jewel appears, *people simply adore and worship it*, hoping for some kind of blessing, and have no more admiration for flowers, incense, etc, nor go to the shrines of spirits or non-human to worship. The point of saying all this, however, is merely as a foil to show how even more admirable is the Buddha Jewel, such that even Brahmā Sahampati himself honours him. Great humans, such as king Bimbisāra of Magadha, king Pasenadi of Kosala, Anātha,piṇḍika and others, too, honour the Buddha. Even after the Buddha's death, great men like king Asoka, honoured him. Even the places of his birth, his awakening, the first teaching, and his passing away, are honoured up to this day. The Commentary adds that after the arising of the wheel jewel, the other jewels each arise in turn. (KhpA 170 f)

### 3.1 THE WHEEL JEWEL

**3.1.1 The power of the wheel jewel.** The most important—that is, the most powerful and valuable—of the wheel-turner's 7 jewels is the wheel jewel (*cakka, ratana*), or more fully, the divine wheel jewel (*dibba cakka, ratana*) [§1.7.2]. It is the wheel's presence that legitimizes and empowers the wheel-turner. **The Khuddaka Pāṭha Commentary** describes the wheel as being “priceless.” Its hub is of sapphire, its thousand spokes are of the seven kinds of gems,<sup>46</sup> its rim of coral, and its joints of red gold. After every ten spokes there is a head-spoke that makes a sound when the wind blows through it, and this is the sound of the five-limbed (pentatonic) music, most beautifully played. On each side of the wheel is a lion-head, with a hollow like that in a cart-wheel.

The wheel jewel has no maker, but arises from the fire element and good karma (DA 2:617). When the king has fulfilled his wheel-turner's duties<sup>47</sup> on the full-moon precept day, keeping to the uposatha precepts,<sup>48</sup> purifying his moral virtue, in his private chambers on the palace roof-garden, he sees the wheel rising in the east like the sun or a full moon. Its sound is audible for 12 leagues around, and it is visible for a league.<sup>49</sup> The people who see it, cry out in an uproar, saying, “It is a second moon or sun rising!”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Sometimes mistranslated lit as “mantras,” magical spells (eg UA:M 1:268,13), which has no basis in the stories and texts on the wheel-turner that we have in the suttas.

<sup>45</sup> *Ussāha, satti, yogo...manta, satti, yogo...pabhū, satti, yogo*; also DA 250; MA 3:366; UA 104. See SED sv *cakti*, where these three are given as the components of regal power.

<sup>46</sup> The 7 kinds of gems (*satta, ratana*) are gold (*suvanna*), silver (*rūpiya*), beryl (*velūriya*), crystal (*phalika*), ruby (*lohitaṅka*), sapphire (*masāra, galla*), all the jewels (*sabba, ratana*) [§1.4].

<sup>47</sup> This is “the “noble code of the wheel-turner's duties” (*ariya cakka, vatti, vatta*), def in **Cakka, vatti Siha, nāda S** (D 26), as those of his being a wholesome refuge to his subjects as well as “animals and birds,” to treat well and support those whom he has conquered [§5a], and to learn from the wise and virtuous holy men [§5b] (D 26.5/3:61), SD 36.10. A later list is the 10 “royal duties or virtues” (*rāja, dhamma*), viz (1) generosity (*dāna*), (2) moral virtue (*sīla*), (3) self-charity or sacrifice (*pariccāga*), (4) integrity (*ājjava*), (5) kind gentleness (*maddava*), (6) austerity or self-restraint (*tapa*), (7) non-anger (*akkodha*), (8) non-violence (*avihimsā*), (9) patience (*khanti*), and (10) non-hostility and law-abiding (*avirodhana*). They are summarized in a **Mahā Haṁsa J** (J 534) stanza: *dānaṃ sīlaṃ pariccāgaṃ | ājjavaṃ maddavaṃ tapam | akkodham avihimsaṃ ca | khantiṃ ca avirodhanam* (J 534/5:378): SD 36.10 (5.4.1.4).

<sup>48</sup> On the observance (*upostha*) & the uposatha (8) precepts, see **(Tad-ah') Uposatha S** (A 3.70/1:205-215), SD 4.18. On celibacy, see **Sexuality**, SD 31.7 (6).

<sup>49</sup> A league (*yojana*), as an object, is the yoke of an Indian plough (J 6:38, 42). As a measurement of distance, it is as far as can be covered by a yoke of oxen, ie, about 11.25 km or 7 mi (DhA 1:108, 2:13).

<sup>50</sup> DA 2:619; MA 4:217.



and it passes over the city until it reaches the east side of the palace, where it stops fixed at the axle, just at the right height for people to honour it.

**The Mahā Sudassana Sutta** (D 17) calls it the “divine wheel jewel” [3.1.4], when it first appears in the sky. As such, it seems to be a magical symbol, perhaps originally a star or a constellation. Hence, it is not a physical object or being, like the other six jewels, but came to be treated as an object.<sup>51</sup> The suttas say that when the wheel appears before the wheel-turner, he sprinkles it with lustral water and exhorts it, “Turn, sir wheel jewel! Conquer, sir wheel jewel!”<sup>52</sup> The wheel, it is said, then advances successively in each of the four quarters, followed by the king and his fourfold army. In this way, says **the Iti,vuttaka Commentary**, the wheel-turner conquers others (ItA 77).

There is a hint of a royal “horse sacrifice” (Skt *aśva,medha*) here [3.2]. It is likely that the wheel-turner myth is an attempt of the Buddha or the early Buddhists in either ending its bloody rituals or to reform it into a more wholesomely meaningful practice. In this, apparently, the Buddhists were successful, as the ritual was almost unknown after the Buddha’s time.<sup>53</sup>

“The fourfold army” (*catur-aṅga sena*) comprises foot-soldiers (infantry), horses (cavalry), elephants (artillery) and chariots.<sup>54</sup> *Catur* is the modern Indonesian and Malay word for “chess,” originally, a favourite game of royalty in ancient India and Persia. It is also the root-word of the English term. In *chess*, the infantry, cavalry, elephants, and chariots, are represented respectively by pawn, knight, bishop, and rook.<sup>55</sup> In fact, figuratively, the Sanskrit *cakra* can mean “the wheel of a monarch’s chariot rolling over his dominions, sovereignty, realm.”<sup>56</sup> The realm itself was sometimes known as a *maṇḍala* (circle) [6.1.4].<sup>57</sup> The circle, after all, is a symbol of totality (being round) and security (being closed).<sup>58</sup>

The wheel jewel is not an heirloom (it is not inherited), and the next king has to be worthy of it by ensuring that his life is one of perfect moral quality [§1.7]. Once he has proven himself worthy of the wheel jewel, he becomes a wheel-turner, and the other six jewels would appear to him in turn. The wheel, in other words, symbolizes an ancient form of *heavenly mandate to rule*. Of all the 7 jewels, only the wheel is of *celestial descent* in a literal sense. In ancient India, and in the Indianized kingship of SE Asian kingdoms, the king is traditionally regarded (at least in pre-modern times) as being of divine descent, even a divine being. Traditionally, a king is said to be “a deva by convention” (*sammatti deva*),<sup>59</sup> and as such referred to or addressed as *deva* (usually translated as “your majesty”).<sup>60</sup>

**3.1.2 The wheel jewel as a palladium.** A number of 20<sup>th</sup>-century scholars regard the wheel jewel as related to the sun. T W Rhys Davids, for example, thinks that it is the solar disc itself (D:2:202 n3). Heinrich Zimmer thinks that the radiant apparition of the wheel in the sky is that of the neolithic symbol of the sun-wheel,<sup>61</sup> while Jan Gonda says that the wheel is a symbol of the sun in its daily course illuminating, that is, “ruling,” the earth.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>51</sup> A K Coomaraswamy has suggested that the sculptural figures of the wheel-turner from Jaggayapeta prob represent Mahā Sudassana (1929:59).

<sup>52</sup> *Pavattatu bhavaṃ cakka,ratanāṃ, abhivijjīnātu bhavaṃ cakka,ratanāṃ ti: Mahā Sudassana S* (D 17.1.8/2:172), SD 36.12; **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26.6/3:62), SD 36.10; **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129.35/3:172), SD 2.22.

<sup>53</sup> See **(Pasenadi) Yañña S** (S 3.9/1:75 f) & SD 22.11 (1.2.2); SA 1:144; SnA 322.

<sup>54</sup> D 2:190; S 1:83; J 2:102, 104; Vism 146; SnA 225, 353; DhA 4:144; cf J 6:275.

<sup>55</sup> See H J R Murray, *A History of Chess*, Oxford, 1913.

<sup>56</sup> Yajñavalkya 1.265; Mahābhārata 1.13; Bhāgavata Purāṇa 9.20, 32; Viṣṇu Purāṇa (SED), but these are post-Buddhist works. So too at Otto Boehtlingk & Rudolf Roth, *Grosses Petersburger Wörterbuch*, 1855-75:906.

<sup>57</sup> See eg Denise Leidy & Robert Thurman, *Maṇḍala: Architecture of Enlightenment*. Boston: Shambhala, 1997.

<sup>58</sup> On Borobudur as a mandala, see <http://www.borobudur.tv/architecture.htm>. For general refs on mandala, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandala>.

<sup>59</sup> The 3 kinds of devas are (1) the conventional deva (*sammatti*), ie the king; (2) a deva by birth (*upapatti*), ie a divine being, and (3) a deva by purification (*visuddhi deva*), ie an arhat (Nc 307; KhpA 123).

<sup>60</sup> V 1:348, 4:158; D 1:47, 2:16; M 2:13; A 1:138; Pv 18.15; J 1:179, 4:120, 6:285.

<sup>61</sup> H Zimmer, *The Philosophies of India*, London, 1963:129.

<sup>62</sup> Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*, Leiden, 1966:124.

In terms of kingship in later times, such as those of pre-colonial Sri Lanka and the SE Asian Buddhist kingdoms, the wheel-jewel would be said to be a “palladium.”<sup>63</sup> Sri Lanka still has the Buddha’s eye-tooth (or its replica) as the national palladium preserved in the Tooth Relic Temple in Kandy since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Even in modern Sri Lanka, as a token of legitimacy of the elected government, the prime minister holds one of the three keys to the enclosure in which the tooth relic is enshrined.

In 1178, Siam (today called Thailand) conquered the southern kingdom of Vieng Chan (Vientiane) (modern Lao), asserted control over the northern kingdom of Luang Phrabang, and removed both their palladia, the **Phra Bang** and the **Phra Kaeow** Buddha images to Siam. In 1782, the Siamese restored the Vietnamese dynasty as a puppet regime in Vieng Chan and returned the Phra Bang.

During the reign of **Tiloka** (r 1442-1487), the Phra Kaeow was adopted as the national palladium of Siam, and has remained so there ever since. Today, it is enshrined in Wat Phra Kaeow, the royal chapel, popularly known as the Emerald Buddha Temple. However, the stone is probably a large piece of jasper, a semi-precious stone.<sup>64</sup>

### **3.1.3 The horse sacrifice (*aśva.medha*).**

The horse sacrifice was the most important and complex of Vedic rituals, performed by a king to celebrate his glory. The ritual is described in detail in various Vedic writings, especially the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.<sup>65</sup> A hand-picked stallion was allowed to roam freely for a year under the protection of royal guards. If the horse entered a foreign country, its ruler had either to fight or to submit.

If the horse remained uncaptured, it was brought back at the year’s end and publicly sacrificed in a fertility rite [Fig 3.1.3]. The wandering horse symbolized the sun’s orbit around the world (so to speak), that is, the king’s power over the earth (or known world). On the successful completion of the sacrifice, the king could then assume the title of *cakravarti* (universal monarch). The ritual was believed to ensure the prosperity and fertility of the whole kingdom.

It is a well known historical fact that the Buddha condemns the horse sacrifice, which consequently seems to have suffered a significant decline. Samudra Gupta (c 330-c 180 BCE), however, is known to have issued coins commemorating his successful completion of an *aśva.medha*. It was performed by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga (r 187-151 BCE), after he had assassinated the last Maurya king. It may have continued well into the 11th century, when a Chōḷa king was believed to have performed it, too.

In such discourses as **the Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 26), the great man (*mahā,purisa*) appears only as a “wheel-turning king” (*cakka,vatti*) who rules the world non-violently, a refuge to his subjects, and magnanimous to the conquered. This Sutta is also an effective statement against the bloodiness of the *aśva.medha* of the kshatriya rajahs. In other words, such discourses are, at least in disguised form, social statements against certain negative practices and beliefs.<sup>66</sup>

**3.1.4 The divine wheel jewel.** Only when the divine wheel jewel (*dibba cakka, ratana*) appears in the sky above the king [§3a] does he become the wheel-turner. As long as the wheel remains aloft, he re-



**Fig 3.1.3** Illustration of the Rāmāyaṇa by Sahib Din, 1652. Kauśalya is depicted slaying the horse (left) and lying beside it (right).

<sup>63</sup> That is, a sacred object believed to have the power to protect and preserve a city or state possessing it.

<sup>64</sup> Frank E Reynolds 1978:175-193; Tambiah 1984:214 f, 217-219.

<sup>65</sup> **The Aśva,medha** (horse sacrifice) is described in detail in the Yajurveda (TS 7.1-5, YV VSM 22-25 & comy in Śatapatha Brahmana, ŚBM 13.1-5). The Ṛgveda gives a brief description of the sacrifice, notably in hymns ṚgV 1.162-163, but does not allude to the full ritual as found in the Yajurveda.

<sup>66</sup> D 26/3:58-79 @ SD 36.10, see esp §5d & Intro 1.2.

mains so in power, but when it “descends, falls to the ground,” his sovereignty ends, and often his life, too [§3b]. This idea of the divine wheel jewel, however, is nowhere else to be found in the ancient Buddhist texts nor in the ancient Indian texts. Its origins must therefore come from elsewhere.

One of the possible origins of the divine wheel jewel is in **Ashurism**, the ancient religion of Assyria and Babylonia. Ashur or Assur (Neo-Assyrian, often shortened to Ash), the head of the pantheon, probably originated as the deified city of Assur (pronounced Ashur) (3000-700 BCE). When Assyria conquered Babylon in the Sargon period (8th-7th centuries BCE), Assyrian scribes began to write Ashur’s name with the cuneiform signs “an.ashar,” literally “whole heaven” in Akkadian, the language of Babylon. The intention was apparently to put Ashur at the head of the Babylonian pantheon, where Anshar and his counterpart Kishar (“whole earth”).

Neo-Assyrian “feather-robed archer” representing Ashur. His right hand is extended similar to the Faravahar (best known symbol of the Zoroastrians), while the left hand holds a bow, instead of a ring (as in the Zoroastrian winged figure) (ca 9th or 8th BCE relief).

Some scholars have claimed that Ashur was represented as the solar disc that appears frequently in Assyrian iconography, but this is in fact the sun god Shamash. The symbols of Ashur include:

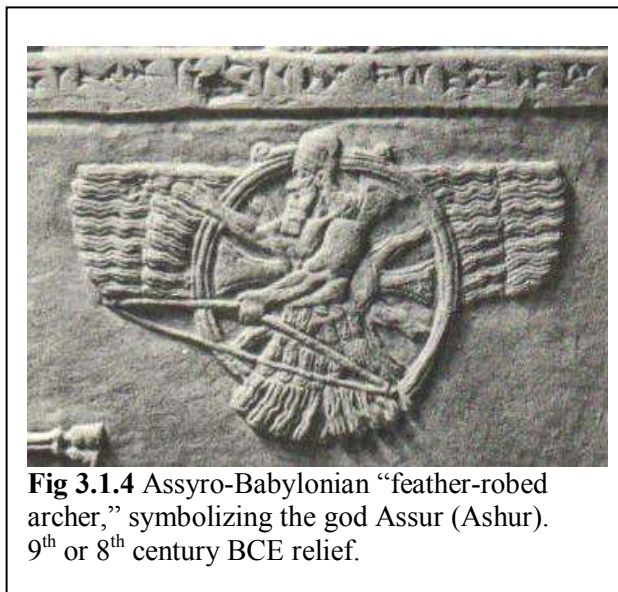
- (1) a winged disc with horns, a rim of four concentric circles; undulating rays shoot out from both sides;
- (2) a floating winged circle or wheel, behind a bearded warrior drawing his bow to shoot an arrow;
- (3) the same circle, with the bow in the warrior’s left hand, while his right hand is uplifted as if to bless his worshipers [Fig 3.1.4].

The influence of Mesopotamian cultures on ancient Indian culture (including Buddhism) is probably greater than we think. **The Kevaḍḍha Sutta** (D 11), for example, preserves an ancient allusion to the imagery of the “land-sighting bird” (*tīra, dassim sakunam*).<sup>67</sup> This bird-dispatching episode is found in numerous ancient flood myths.<sup>68</sup> Such accounts about Mesopotamian history and culture were probably well known in India of the Buddha’s time.

**3.2 THE ELEPHANT JEWEL.** According to **the Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta** (M 129), the wheel-turner’s elephant jewel (*hatthi, ratana*), “the king of elephants,” called Uposatha [Sabbath], is pure white, with the sevenfold supports,<sup>69</sup> with supernormal power, capable of flying through the air. On seeing him, the wheel-turning king’s heart is inspired to train it so that it becomes a fine well-trained thoroughbred elephant. In fact, it is said to be able to fly. The king mounts him in the morning, and after traversing the whole earth to the ocean’s horizon, he returns to the royal capital in time for his morning meal!<sup>70</sup>

**The Khuddaka Pāṭha Commentary** says that the elephant jewel comes from either the Uposatha clan or from the Chaddanta (“six-tusked”) clan. If it is from the former, it is the eldest; if the latter, it is the youngest, but fully trained and tamed (KhpA 172).

The elephant and the horse are not only the *vehicles* of the king, but they are also his *artillery* (comparable to modern tanks) and *cavalry*. While the wheel jewel, as it were, *legitimizes* the wheel-turner’s



**Fig 3.1.4** Assyro-Babylonian “feather-robed archer,” symbolizing the god Assur (Ashur). 9<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE relief.

<sup>67</sup> D 11.85/1:222 f @ SD 1.7.

<sup>68</sup> See **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 (1.5).

<sup>69</sup> That is, four strong legs, two powerful tusks and its trunk.

<sup>70</sup> M 129.36/3:173 f, SD 2.22.

conquests, the elephant and the horse jewels—his magical vehicles—*effect* them.<sup>71</sup> The discourses also clearly impresses on us that the king trains the elephant and has full control over it. Not only has the wheel-turner a powerful army, but he is also in full control of the situation.

**3.3 THE HORSE JEWEL.** The wheel-turner’s horse jewel (*assa, ratana*), named Valāhaka (Thunder-cloud), the king of horses, is all white, black-headed, with a mane as soft as munja grass.<sup>72</sup> As with the elephant jewel, the king mounts the horse jewel in the morning, and after traversing the whole earth to the ocean’s horizon, he returns to the royal capital in time for his morning meal!<sup>73</sup>

**3.4 THE GEM JEWEL. The Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta** (M 129) says that the gem jewel (*maṇi, ratana*) is a *beryl* of the purest water, eight-faceted, and well-cut. Its radiance shines all around for a whole league. When the king mounts the jewel on top of his banner and sets forth with his army in the gloomy darkness of the night, it lights up the whole area so that the villagers all around set about their daily work by its light, thinking it is day!<sup>74</sup> The light is so bright that even little ants can be clearly seen (KhpA 173).

**3.5 THE WOMAN JEWEL. The Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta** (M 129) describes the woman jewel (*itthī, ratana*) as beautiful, comely and graceful, of the best complexion, neither too tall nor too short, neither too thin nor too fat, neither too dark nor too fair, surpassing human beauty, though not reaching the beauty of the gods. Her touch is soft like a tuft of cotton-wool or of kapok (silk-cotton). To the wheel-turner, when it is cool, her limbs are warm; when it is warm, her limbs are cool. Her body exudes the fragrance of sandalwood, and her mouth has the scent of lotuses. She rises before the wheel-turning king and retires after him. She is eager to serve, agreeable in conduct, and sweet in speech. Even in thought, she is never unfaithful to the wheel-turning king, how then could she be in body?<sup>75</sup>

The Mahā Sudassana Sutta gives her name as **Subhaddā** [§2.7],<sup>76</sup> and her conversation with king Mahā Sudassana is the Sutta’s highlight [§§2.8-10]. The king instructs here in impermanence [§§2.11-12], and then passes away [§2.13].

**The Khuddaka Pāṭha Commentary** adds that she is the chief queen, and comes from either Uttara Kuru country or from the Madda, rāja clan. As already mentioned in **the Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta**, she is free from the six defects (KhpA 173). In other words, she symbolizes the perfect woman, capable of being a worthy queen or empress, and entertaining her husband. More importantly, she must be able to bear him “more than a thousand sons, brave, heroic in form, crushing alien armies.”<sup>77</sup> A close-knit royal family ensures loyalty to the king, and effective rule of the realm. In this role, the king is sometimes referred to as “husband or lord of the earth” (*bhū, pati*), and the woman jewel symbolizes the fertile earth, but this is a late term found only in the commentarial works.<sup>78</sup>

**3.6 THE STEWARD JEWEL.** According to **the Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta** (M 129), the steward jewel (*gahapati, ratana*), as a result of his past good karma, is endowed with the divine eye,<sup>79</sup> whereby he sees hidden jewels, both with owner and ownerless. Whenever the wheel-turner needs wealth, he instructs the steward to “dowse,” as it were, for treasure. For example, sailing mid-stream on the Ganges, the steward could locate the spot where he then draws up a pot full of silver and gold out of the water, and to retrieve as much treasure as the king needs!<sup>80</sup>

**The Khuddaka Pāṭha Commentary** adds that he is normally the royal banker, endowed with the divine eye with which he is able to locate hidden treasure up to a hundred leagues around. He is skilled in

<sup>71</sup> See Chakravarti 1987:153-155.

<sup>72</sup> *Muñja*, Saccharum munja Roxb, a soft grass, often worn by ancient Indian warriors signifying that they would stand their ground and never retreat (D 2:174; Sn 18, 440).

<sup>73</sup> M 129,37/3:174 @ SD 2.22.

<sup>74</sup> M 129,38/3:174 @ SD 2.22; KhpA 172.

<sup>75</sup> M 129,39/3:174 f @ SD 2.22.

<sup>76</sup> Also at S 3:145; J 1:392.

<sup>77</sup> **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,1.31/2:16), **Mahā,sudassana S** (D 17.1.8-11/2:172), **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26,-2b/3:59), **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3,1.5/1:88); ItA 77.

<sup>78</sup> But see J W Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India*, Oxford, 1964:209; Chakravarti 1987:156.

<sup>79</sup> This is apparently an ordinary clairvoyance, not the knowledge of others’ karma (for which see, eg, D 1:81).

<sup>80</sup> M 129,40/3:175 @ SD 2.22.



putting the king's wealth to beneficial use (KhpA 173). The symbolism here is clear: for a kingdom or an empire to prosper, not to say survive, it needs a "full treasury" (*paripuṇṇa, kosa, koṭṭh'āgāra*).<sup>81</sup> Much funds are needed to maintain a strong army for the security and prosperity of such a realm.<sup>82</sup>

The steward is not only the foundation of the realm's system of production, but also its system of effective revenue collection. The word *gaha, pati* more commonly means "household," that is, a landed citizen who is capable of contributing funds to the royal treasury through taxes and through entrepreneurship. The householders, in other words, form the foundation of the wealth of the nation.

Here, however, the *gaha, pati* has broader roles: he is in effect "the lord of the royal house," a sort of head of the privy council, as well as finance minister, of the wheel-turner. Not only does he take care of the wheel-turner's worldly wealth, but his task is also to ensure that the wealth is sufficient, or that it is replenished. Hence, "steward" would reflect his functions best.

**3.7 THE COMMANDER JEWEL.** The commander jewel (*pariṇāyaka, ratana*), says **the Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta** (M 129), is wise, skillful, and sagacious,<sup>83</sup> capable of advising the king on all state and administrative matters, putting him at ease.<sup>84</sup> **The Mahā Sudassana Sutta** seems to suggest that the commander jewel also functions as a sort of leader or general of the king's armies. He is said to be the head of the 84,000 kshatriyas, subjects of the king [§2.5].<sup>85</sup> Through his commander jewel, the king daily gives instructions regarding the 84,000 royal elephants [§2.6]. He is the one who arranges for the army to meet the king [§2.7]. In short, he is effectively the king's prime minister, who executes both civil and military duties.

**The Khuddaka Pāṭha Commentary** says that he is usually the king's eldest son (KhpA 173). Understandably, he is also the heir-apparent, as exemplified by the general (*senā, pati*) Viḍudabha, son of king Pasenadi of Kosala.<sup>86</sup> The commander is very skillful in governing the country, so that the king is able to live in royal ease. In fact, he has the extraordinary power of mind-reading, and is able to fathom the thoughts of others for 23 leagues around without their knowledge! (KhpA 173).

This is, of course, the language of myth, which in ordinary speech means that the commander jewel is in touch with the people and able to rightly gauge public sentiments so that he can wisely advise the king on his activities and policies. All this clearly refers to the royal commander's social, economic and political acumen, so that the king, too, is in touch with the populace, which is to his own advantage: the wheel-turner, after all, the ideal king.

**3.8 THE CAKKA, VATTI SUTTA.** This is a very short sutta that lists only the wheel-turning king's 7 jewels,<sup>87</sup> and that the Buddha, too, has his 7 jewels, which, however, are also available to the world with his appearance.<sup>88</sup>

## SD 36.12(3.8)

## (Satta Ratana) Cakka, vatti Sutta

The Discourse on (the 7 jewels of) the Wheel-turner | S 46.42/5:99

S 5.2.5.2 = Saṃyutta Nikāya 5, Mahā Vagga 2, Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta 5, Cakkavatti Vagga 2

Theme: The seven jewels of the wheel-turner and of the world-teacher

<sup>81</sup> V 1:342 (×2); **Kūṭa, danta S** (D 5.10/1:134, 13/137, 17b/140), SD 22.8, **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30.2.2.2/1:163), SD 36.9; **Yassaṃ Disaṃ S** (A 5.131.2/3:151, 3/3:152); Miln 2.

<sup>82</sup> See G B Gokhale 1966:17-28.

<sup>83</sup> *Paṇḍito byatto medhāvī paṭibalo.*

<sup>84</sup> M 129.41/3:175 f @ SD 2.22.

<sup>85</sup> D 17.2.5/2:188 @ SD 36.12.

<sup>86</sup> On *Viḍudabha*, see DhA 4.3/1:345-360; Intro to J 133 (J 4:144-153). The embedded story of the past (DhA 1:342-345) is a free version of J 346 (J 3:142-145). Cf J 1:133, 4:146 f, 151f. In the sculptures representing the wheel-turner at Jaggayapeta, India, the commander is depicted as a boy (A K Coomaraswamy 1929:59).

<sup>87</sup> On *the wheel-turner & his 7 jewels*, see **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26/3:58-79) & SD 36.10 (2.3).

<sup>88</sup> On the evolution of the wheel-turner's 7 treasures and the Buddha's 7 jewels, and their connection, see **Ariya Dhana S 2** (A 7.6) @ SD 37.6 (1.3).



### The wheel-turner's 7 jewels

2 Bhikshus, with the arising of the wheel-turner, there is the arising of the 7 jewels.

What are the seven?

3	There is the arising of	the wheel-jewel	<i>cakka, ratana.</i>
	There is the arising of	the elephant-jewel	<i>hatthi, ratana.</i>
	There is the arising of	the horse-jewel	<i>assa, ratana.</i>
	There is the arising of	the gem-jewel	<i>maṇi, ratana.</i>
	There is the arising of	the woman-jewel	<i>itthi, ratana.</i>
	There is the arising of	the steward-jewel	<i>gaha.pati, ratana.</i>
	There is the arising of	the commander-jewel	<i>pariṇāyaka, ratana.</i>

Bhikshus, with the arising of the wheel-turner, there is the arising of these 7 jewels.

### The Buddha's 7 jewels

4 Bhikshus, with the arising of the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, there is the arising of the 7 jewels.

What are the seven?

5	There is the arising of the jewel, that is the awakening-factor of	mindfulness	<i>sati sambojjhaṅga.</i>
	There is the arising of the jewel, that is the awakening-factor of	dharma-investigation	<i>dhamma, vicaya sambojjhaṅga.</i>
	There is the arising of the jewel, that is the awakening-factor of	effort	<i>viriya, sambojjhaṅga.</i>
	There is the arising of the jewel, that is the awakening-factor of	zest	<i>pīti, sambojjhaṅga.</i>
	There is the arising of the jewel, that is the awakening-factor of	tranquillity	<i>passaddhi, sambojjhaṅga.</i>
	There is the arising of the jewel, that is the awakening-factor of	mental concentration	<i>samādhi, sambojjhaṅga.</i>
	There is the arising of the jewel, that is the awakening-factor of	equanimity	<i>upekkhā sambojjhaṅga.</i>

Bhikshus, with the arising of the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, there is the arising of these 7 jewels.

— evaṃ —

## 4 A mythology of the Buddhist journey

### 4.1 SPIRITUAL TRAINING

#### 4.1.1 Charity, self-taming and restraint

4.1.1.1 MAHĀ SUDASSANA'S CHARITY. Those who read suttas literally, only on the word level, might take **the Mahā Sudassana Sutta** simply as a story of a wheel-turner (*cakka, vatti*). Of course, we could well ask: why feature the wheel-turner as the narrative's key actor? Could the discourse be addressing the ruler of the time, the emperor Asoka (r 269-232 BCE)?<sup>89</sup> Is the Sutta a memorial to emperor Asoka? The Mahā Sudassana Sutta, however, has little, if anything, to do with the Buddha's view of kingship, as this whole section will show. It is a rule, in fact, that whenever the Buddha makes a statement on something worldly (such as his answer to Vassa, kara's questions at the start of the Mahā, parinibbāna Sutta),<sup>90</sup> he

<sup>89</sup> On *Asoka*, see **Cakka, vatti Siha, nāda S** (D 26) @ SD 36.10 (2.2.4).

<sup>90</sup> D 16, 1.1-12/2:72-81 @ SD 9.

always relates it directly or indirectly to Buddhist training or the Dharma. A sutta, above all, is about the Dharma.

In fact, a close study of the Mahā Sudassana Sutta will show that it is a reflection on the three grounds for merit-making (*ti puñña, kiriya vatthu*), those of giving, of moral virtue, and of mental cultivation,<sup>91</sup> a simpler form of the three trainings of moral virtue, mental concentration and of insight wisdom.<sup>92</sup> The term used in the Mahā Sudassana Sutta is even simpler: charity, self-taming and restraint (*dāna dama saṃyama*) [§2.1].

The Sutta relates how king Mahā Sudassana practises public charity (*dāna*) at the lakes [§§1.23.4-5, 1.33 etc]; self-taming (*dama*), which refers to his bodily restraint through the precepts [§1.7.2; cf §1.24.1-3]; and sense-restraint (*saṃyama*) in the presence of the women [§2.8]. All this shows a careful preparation for deep meditation and dhyana attainment. For the full benefits of meditation, we should begin by laying a good foundation of wholesome karma or merit (*puñña*), and for the laity, this is best done by way of practising joyful charity and moral virtue.<sup>93</sup>

Mahā Sudassana's charity, unlike the fabulous givings of other kings or brahmins,<sup>94</sup> is of immediate and practical benefit to the recipients. For example, he builds public gardens and lakes of lotuses, which anyone could freely use to make garlands if they wish to [§1.23.1-2], and free public spas with attendants beside the lake [§1.23.3]. In the vicinity of the same scenic lakes, he gives away living necessities (food and clothing), vehicles, beddings, and money, depending on their needs. Interestingly, and not mentioned anywhere else, the king also gives away women to men seeking marriage-partners: one of history's earliest matching services! [§1.23.4].<sup>95</sup>

**The Mahā Sudassana Cariya** (C 1.4), which details his giving, says that he makes this charitable giving three times a day. But he does not stop here. When the Dharma and the lotus lakes are completed, he goes on to provide recluses and brahmins with whatever they needed [§1.33]. All this is done to ensure that all is well in his realm in preparation for his own spiritual quest [4.2.2].

4.1.1.2 MAHĀ SUDASSANA'S MORAL VIRTUE. We are given the impression that king Mahā Sudassana, like all wheel-turners, are by nature morally virtuous. In fact, it is through his observance of the precept-days (*uposatha*), that he becomes a wheel-turner [§1.7.2], and wherever he goes in his realm, he would exhort even other kings subject to him *to keep to the five precepts*, without interfering in their internal affairs [§§1.9-10].<sup>96</sup>

Yet Mahā Sudassana is not a moralistic or religious overbearing potentate. His royal city of Kusā, vātī is a sort of paradise, with beautiful sprawling parks, full of colourful trees bedecked with precious substances and gems, numerous lakes well laid out with railings, seats and platforms, where people bathe in or enjoy themselves alongside, and shady palm-groves to rest and play in. In fact, Kusā, vātī is a crowded metropolis replete with food and luxuries, and vibrant with “ten sounds” of joy and activity [§1.3]. In short, all his subjects, we can presume, are meant to be happy in every way.

Clearly, it is Mahā Sudassana's moral virtue that has endowed him with the wheel-turner's seven jewels [§§1.7-17] and also his fourfold charismatic qualities [§1.18-21]. Yet, for all his charity, the king does not seem to need the seven jewels at all. They seem almost out of place in the Sutta. He is clearly seen to be a religious layman who is preparing himself for some sort of spiritual renunciation—like the wheel-turners described in **the Cakka, vatti Siha, nāda Sutta** (D 26).<sup>97</sup>

<sup>91</sup> On the 3 grounds for merit-making, see **D 33**, 1.10(38)/3:218 & **Puñña, kiriya, vatthu S** (A 8.36/4:241-243), SD 22.17, **Puñña, kiriya, vatthu S** (It 3.2.1/19-21), SD 22.17(2.1) & **Mettā Bhāvanā S** (It 1.3.7) @ SD 30.7 (1.1.1).

<sup>92</sup> A “three-training” theme pervades **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16), too: see SD 9 (10d) & **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88 /1:235), SD 24.10c.

<sup>93</sup> On the proper way of doing this, see **Cāgānussati**, SD 15.12 & **Sīlānussati**, SD 15.11.

<sup>94</sup> Cf king Pasenadi's “incomparable giving”: **Asadisa, dāna Vatthu** (DhA 13.10/3:182-192), SD 22.10; & Kūṭa, danta's sacrifice: **(Pasenadi) Yañña S** (S 3.9/1:75 f), SD 22.11.

<sup>95</sup> C 1.4/28-36/3 f.

<sup>96</sup> On the relationship of moral virtue to meditation, see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (3).

<sup>97</sup> D 26, 2-8/3:59-64 @ SD 36.10.

4.1.1.3 MAHĀ SUDASSANA'S MENTAL CULTIVATION. Like other wheel-turners, as recorded in the suttas, Mahā Sudassana then practises a renunciation of sort. When all his royal duties and charitable works have been done—in the case of a wheel-turner, it is his steward jewel [3.6] who manages the realm's funds, and his commander jewel [3.7] who administers the country—Mahā Sudassana retires to a very special chamber, unique amongst the 84,000 pinnacled halls he has built [§1.26.6].<sup>98</sup> There, he goes into deep meditation in the pinnacled hall of the great dispelling [4.1.2], and attains dhyana [2.3].

The translation of *mahā, v[ī]yūha kūṭ'āgāra* as “the pinnacled hall of great dispelling” needs some explanation. The word *vyūha* (also *byūha* or *viyūha*), which seems to elude even Gethin (2006:75 n34), is derived from *vi-* (with the sense of *intensifying*, as in *vi-passanna*, “intensely clear,” or *away*, as in *vinaya*, “taking away (bad)”) + √VAH, to carry. It has at least two different senses:

(1) In the first sense, it is usually spelt *vyūha* or *byūha*, “heap, mass; massing or crowding, grouping of troops, battle array.” **The Mahānāma Sutta 1** (S 55.21) has the phrase *sambādha, vyūha*, “congested streets,”<sup>99</sup> where *vīyūha* has a literal sense of “street, thoroughfare, route” (SA 3:287).

(2) In the second sense, *vīyūha* is derived from *vi* + √UH, “to remove” (a differentiated form of √VAH, to carry). Hence, *vīyūhati* means to take away, carry off, remove (eg *pāmsuṃ vīyūhati*, V 3:248). This is the sense used in two Sutta Nipāta discourses—**Mahā Vīyūha S** (Sn 4.12) and **Cūḷa Vīyūha S** (Sn 4.13)—which K R Norman translates as “(mental) disposition” (Sn:N), or better, “that which needs to be disposed of” (ie views). Since the Sutta context here is that of *meditation*, especially dhyana, it should neither be rendered as “complex” (D:RD 2:214 etc) or as “array” (S:B 2000: 954; Gethin 2008:109 etc); Walshe (1995:285) missed out the word altogether)

The second sense applies here: we could translate *mahā, vyūha kūṭ'āgāra* as “the pinnacled hall of great disposition,” or better as “pinnacled hall of great dispelling,” which more simply and clearly refers to the ridding of the mental hindrances. The hall, as such, refers to a place conducive to the clearing away of all mental hindrances, and hence, to the arising to dhyanas. The whole episode, in other words, is a meditation parable.

#### 4.2 A MEDITATION PARABLE

**4.2.1 Leaving the three worlds.** As Gethin has pointed out, the Mahā Sudassana Sutta as a whole “is basically a narrative of a journey out of this world” (2006:88). He identifies three levels of the narrative, namely,

- (1) the backdrop of the Mahā Sudassana story is the Buddha's parinirvana (that is, his death or departure from our *physical world*, that is, on a historical level);
- (2) Mahā Sudassana's life and death (especially in the Pali version) forms a literary counterpoint to the story of the Buddha's death (that is, the Buddha's departure from *the world of beings*, that is, on a psychological level); and
- (3) Mahā Sudassana's own withdrawal from the world into deep meditation, and then rebirth in the brahma world (that is, a spiritual level, pointing towards liberation *from the world of formations*). (2006:88-93)

Here, I have superimposed the commentarial concept of the “three worlds” (*loka*)<sup>100</sup>—within parentheses—as a deeper reflection on what Gethin has suggested. The historical Buddha's departure from the physical world (*okāsa loka*) is universal fact of impermanence. We are here reminded of his humanity: hence, the possibility of any of us to attain what the Buddha has attained, that is, supreme liberation. In simpler terms, we can get out of the suffering world, if we want to—just as the Buddha has done.

On a psychological level, the Buddha's death, as re-enacted in king Mahā Sudassana's death is a reminder that even the Buddha, the highest of beings, that is, whatever that lives, must die. But it is the utter

<sup>98</sup> Of course, it is possible that all the 84,000 pinnacled halls might have the same name, which means they serve the same purpose: meditation [4.1.2].

<sup>99</sup> S 55.21/5:369. See PED: *byūha*.

<sup>100</sup> The Comys speak of the 3 worlds as the world (1) of formations (*saṅkhāra loka*), (3) of beings (*sattva loka*), and of space (*okāsa loka*) (Vism 7.37/204 f; DA 1:173; MA 1:397, 2:200). See **Rohitassa S** (S 2.26( @ SD 7.2 (1).

end of a cyclic journey, no more to be caught up in the world, nor the lower worlds, nor even the heavens. The Buddha's death is the climax of his teaching, that every thing and everyone is impermanent. His death should neither be romanticized nor spiritualized: *nor should it be denied*. Such a denial can become the basis or excuse for creating new “buddhas” in our own image and new Buddhisms based on our own wants and weaknesses. The Buddha is dead; long life the Dharma!

On the third level, “world” refers to the “world of formations” (*saṅkhāra, loka*), that is, the 5 aggregates of clinging.<sup>101</sup> This is the journey to go beyond the duality of body and mind. In the pinnacled halls of great dispelling, the king overcomes the limitations of his *physical body*. Then, in his meditations, he frees himself from *the mind* itself, attaining dhyana. With his still and clear mind, he reflects on the impermanence of all his possessions and pleasures, even his own life [§2.11], and, as a result, is reborn in the brahma world [§2.13.3].

Elsewhere, such as in **the (Āsava-k,khaya) Jhāna Sutta** (A 9.36), it is shown how the mind stilled and clarified by dhyana can, by going on to reflect on impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, or not-self of the five aggregates, attain to arhathood or non-return.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, with the proper cultivation of the four divine abodes, too—as pointed in **the (Nānā,kaṛaṇa) Mettā Sutta 1** (A 4.125)—we can attain nirvana.<sup>103</sup> Since Mahā Sudassana is living in a time when there is no buddha, without the Buddha's teaching, but with his own moral virtue, he is able to be reborn in the brahma world (one of the best rebirth under such circumstances). The Mahā Sudassana narrative, in other words, is about the potentials of spiritual progress [4.2.2].

#### **4.2.2 Mahā Sudassana's spiritual progress**

4.2.2.1 CHARITY, SELF-TAMING, SENSE-RESTRAINT. The highlight of the Mahā Sudassana Sutta begins with the king's withdrawal from the royal city of Kusā,vātī to the pinnacled hall of great dispelling, the innermost sanctum of the Dharma palace [§2.3]. This spiritual retreat starts after the king is sure that all is well in his realm [4.1.1.1], which is covers the first half or recital (*bhāṇavāra*) of the Sutta [§1], centering around the king's moral virtue (*sīla*) and charity (*dāna*).

As he enters the Dharma palace, he reflects on what has brought him his great power and majesty, “It is of three karmic fruits, three karmic results, that I am now of such great power, of such great might, that is to say, of charity, self-taming and restraint” [§2.1]. It is clear from this passage that the king appreciates that all this has contributed to the conducive environment for his intended spiritual quest.

The Commentary explains the last two terms—*dama* and *saṃyama*—as follows. While in **the Āḷava-ka Sutta** (Sn 181-192), *dama* means “wisdom” (*paññā*), it says that here it should be understood as keeping the uposatha or precept day (*uposatha, kamma*), while *saṃyama* is simply moral virtue (*sīla*) (DA 2:-630-631). Indeed, *dāna* and *sīla* in this sequence, and from the Mahā Sudassana narrative, are the bases for mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) [§2]—thus, making up the three grounds for merit-making [4.1.1.1], which underpins the whole Sutta.

4.2.2.2 THE PINNACLED HALL OF GREAT DISPELLING. Just before entering the pinnacled hall of great dispelling, the king stands at the entrance and utters these inspired words (*udāna*) by way of determination:

“Stop, sensual thoughts! Stop, hateful thoughts! Stop, violent thoughts! Only this far, sensual thoughts! Only this far, hateful thoughts! Only this far, violent thoughts!” [§2.2]

His purpose is clear: he intends to meditate. For, the first two qualities he specifically mentions are a shorthand for the 5 mental hindrances.<sup>104</sup> The last quality—violent thought (*vihiṃsā, vitakka*)—is common with kings and the powerful, and as such has to be specifically addressed. Their 3 wholesome counter-

<sup>101</sup> The 5 aggregates of clinging (*pañc 'upādāna khandha*) are form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. Form is *the physical body*, while the other four aggregates are aspects of *the mind*. See **(Dve) Khandhā S** (S 22.48/3:47 f), SD 17.1a.

<sup>102</sup> A 9.36/4:422-426 @ SD 33.8.

<sup>103</sup> A 4.125/2:128 f @ SD 33.9.

<sup>104</sup> See **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1 (2.1).

parts—non-sensual thoughts (or thoughts of renunciation), hate-free thoughts (or thoughts of lovingkindness), and non-violent thoughts (or thoughts of compassion)—constitute right thought (*sammā saṅkappa*).<sup>105</sup> He enters into his retreat chamber as a celibate practitioner, having renounced (at least for that duration) his kingdom, his wealth and his women: he has truly renounced his world.

The Sutta specifically says that, having entered the pinnacled hall of great dispelling, the king sits down in meditation and attains the four dhyanas [§2.3]. Hence, the Commentary dubs this chamber, “the house of dhyana” (*jhān’āgāra*) (DA 2:632). The Sanskrit version, however, says that he practises only the first dhyans in each of the four chambers, of gold, silver, beryl and crystal. The 大智度論 *Dà zhìdù lùn* [2.5] says that he practises the first, second, third and fourth dhyanas in respectively the gold, silver, beryl and crystal chambers.<sup>106</sup>

4.2.2.3 KASINA. The Commentary adds that the king has no need of any particular kasina<sup>107</sup> to use as a preparatory practice (*parikamma kicca*). Wherever he looks, *gold* serves as yellow kasina, *silver* as white kasina, *ruby* as red kasina, and *sapphire* as blue kasina (DA 2:632) [6.1.2]. Hence, the chamber is an ideal place for dhyana meditation, which we can only enter and use after leaving behind all worldly possessions and pleasures. The Mahā Sudassana Sutta gives a list of the king’s 14 sets of 84,000 possessions [§2.5]. However, he has not really left them completely behind, as he is about to be reminded of them.

**4.2.3 Mahā Sudassana’s queen grieves.** Thousands of years pass (the human lifespan then was very long), and the woman jewel misses the king. While king Mahā Sudassana is deep in his meditation, the 84,000 palace women, in their best finery, led by the woman jewel, Subhaddā [3.5], and attended by the fourfold armies, crowd into the Dharma palace.<sup>108</sup> Queen Subhaddā then leans against the door-post outside the pinnacled hall of great dispelling [§2.7], just as **Ānanda** leans against the door-post of the monks’ lodging and weeps, recalling that he is not yet an arhat, and the Buddha, who is so kind to him, will be passing away soon.<sup>109</sup>

The king, hearing the commotion outside, emerges from his meditation, and opens the door. Seeing the queen, he at once tells her to stop right where she is, and not enter the meditation chamber. This is a symbolic gesture by the king to show that the pinnacled hall of great dispelling is meant only for deep meditation, and that he is still in the midst of his practice [§2.8].

Here, the Sanskrit version adds that the king lowers his eyes to avoid seeing all the harem women in their finery, so as not to arouse lust in himself. The queen then implores the king not to be so uninterested in them.<sup>110</sup> This episode, too, echoes the Māha,parinibbāna Sutta (D 16), where the Buddha, in answer to Ānanda’s questions as to how monks should respond to women, instructs that he should be mindful.<sup>111</sup>

The king then orders a man to place his couch outside in the golden palm grove before his visitors [§2.9]. As the king lies lionwise on his couch, the queen notices that he has a radiant complexion, and at once deduces that he is passing away [§2.10]. This episode mirrors the Buddha’s own transfiguration, when he is donning the golden robe given by Pukkusa Malla,putta, and Ānanda is informed that the Buddha will pass away that night itself.<sup>112</sup>

**4.2.4 Mahā Sudassana & the perception of impermanence.** Queen Subhaddā then urges the king to rouse his will to live by reminding him of his 14 sets of 84,000 possessions [§2.10]. This is reminiscent

<sup>105</sup> See **Sammā Ditṭhī S** (A 4.72/2:76 f), SD 74.13.

<sup>106</sup> The Chinese versions of the Māha,parinirvāṇa Ss vary: DĀ 2 (T1.1) & T1.7 mention 4 dhyanas; MĀ 68 (T1.-26.517a5-19) & T1.5 & T1.6 mention only the perception of impermanence.

<sup>107</sup> Kasina (*kasina*) here means both a meditation device (one of the 4 elements or one of 4 colour (blue, yellow, red, or white): see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (9.2). On the 4 colour *kasina* meditations, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.-3.29-32/2:110 f), SD 9. See also **Vīññāṇa**, SD 17.8a (4.1).

<sup>108</sup> Reflectively, this is a fabulous way of depicting how our past karma might intrude into our meditations—but Sudassana knows what to do, as we shall see.

<sup>109</sup> **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16.5.13/2:143), SD 9.

<sup>110</sup> Matsumura 1988:35,5-37,2 ≠ Waldschmidt 1951:342; Gethin 2006:79 n38.

<sup>111</sup> D 16.5.9/2:141 @ SD 9.

<sup>112</sup> **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16.4.37/2:134 f), SD 9.



of Ānanda's urging the Buddha not to die at 80, but to live out his full life-span.<sup>113</sup> The king then advises the queen that she should not speak so. Instead, she should be positive during his last moments and help him to pass away *by letting go of desire and have no longing for life* [§2.11]. This is, in fact, the theme of **the Nakula Sutta** (A 6.16), where Nakula,mātā advises Nakula,pitā not to die with any longing.<sup>114</sup>

The Sanskrit version of the Mahā Sudassana Sutta highlights, through word-play, how the women here become obstacles to the king's spiritual progress. The king tells the queen how in the past she has always been his friend (*mitra*) but now she is like a rival or opponent (*sapatna*).<sup>115</sup> This word has the same derivation as *sapatnī*, "a co-wife, a woman who shares her husband with other women"—which is exactly what the woman jewel, Subhaddā, is: she shares her husband (the king) with 83,999 others, to be exact! So, concludes Gethin,

the attraction of a life as a king outside in the city with wives and possessions represent rivals—obstacles which are opposed to life in the Palace of Dhamma with no wives and no possessions. The world of the senses outside is opposed to the world of meditation inside. And the way to overcome the opponent? Reflect on its impermanence and thereby lose desire for it. (2006:91)

Both the Pali and the Sanskrit versions then give the "refrain on the 84,000," which is here repeated twice by way of a reflection on impermanence: once by the king himself in admonishing the queen [§2.11.2], and then the queen in response to that instruction [§2.12.2]. The queen, wiping away her tears and composing herself, poignantly begins her own reflection with these words:

All that is loving, your majesty, all that is pleasant, would face separation, face division, face alteration.<sup>116</sup> Pass away, your majesty, without longing. For painful it is for those who pass away with longing; blameworthy are those who pass away with longing.<sup>117</sup> [§2.12.1]

In the Sanskrit version, we find this longer admonition in its place:

Short, your majesty, is human life, moving towards the hereafter. Do good. Live the holy life. For the born there is no immortality. Your majesty, the moment, the instant, the second, too, cannot be known when you must give up your body altogether. Your majesty, may your majesty give up any desire or lust or love or affection or attachment or any effort in longing for anything desirable, agreeable, pleasurable in your majesty's 84,000 women. May your majesty have no longing for life! (Matsumura 1988: §18/39,6-11; Waldschmidt 1951:346, 348)<sup>118</sup>

In fact, the Mahā Sudassana can be seen as *a great myth of impermanence*, inspiring us to practise the perception of impermanence (*anicca saññā*). The theme of impermanence underlies the whole Sutta: the

<sup>113</sup> **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,3.38-40/2:115), SD 9.

<sup>114</sup> A 6.16/3:295-298 & SD 5.2 (2.2) for other related suttas. For stories of those who die with longing, see (**Eka**) **Maccha J** (J 34/1:210 f); (**Duka**) **Maccha J** (J 216/2:178 f; **Kāma Vilāpa J** (J 297/2:443 f).

<sup>115</sup> *Pūrve ca tvaṃ vgaḥinī māṃ mītravat samudācarasi sā tvaṃ tarhi sapatnavat* (Matsumura 1988:39,1 f).

<sup>116</sup> *Sabbeḥ'eva, deva, piyehi manāpehi nānā,bhāvo vinā,bhāvo aññathā,bhāvo*: V 2:284; D 2:118, 144, 158, 163, 192, 194; S 5:162; Nm 1:123. This is a stock reflection on impermanence. A similar stock is spoken of the 6 sense-faculties, that they are "impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise" (*aniccaṃ vipariṇāmiṃ aññathā,bhāvī*), eg (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1.2/3:225), SD 16.7.

<sup>117</sup> In the Skt version, however, the king's instructions are given in general terms without any mention of his imminent death. The king instead returns to the Dharma palace (*dharmā,prāsāda*) to practise the 4 divine abodes. As a result of the king's sustained meditation (*tad,bahula,viḥārī*), we are then generally told, the king is reborn in the brahmā world (Matsumura 1988:42-45). A similar instruction given by another wife to her own dying husband, ie, Nakula,mātā to Nakula,pitā: see **Nakula S** (A 6.16/3:295-298), SD 5.2.

<sup>118</sup> *Alpakam deva jvitam manushyanam. gamanīyah samparāyah, kartavyam* (GBM 1563.8) *kuśalam, caritavyam brahmacaryam. nāsti jātasyāmarāṇam. so 'pi deva kṣaṇalavamuhūrto na prajñāyate yatra devasya sarveṇa sarvam śārīranikṣepo bhaviṣyati.* (GBM 1564.1) *yo devasya caturaśītiṣu strīśahasreṣu cchando vā rāgo vā sneho vā prema vā ālayo vā niyantir adhyavasānam vā tam devaḥ prajahātu nirapekṣo* (GBM 1564.2) *devo bhavatu jvite.* (Matsumura 1988: §18/39,6-11; Waldschmidt 1951:346, 348): my own tr; see Gethin 2006:92.

grandeur of Kusā,vatī, the longevity of Mahā Sudassana and his own meditative practice all build up to the grand climax of impermanence: Mahā Sudassana himself, like the Buddha, passes away. In fact, there are at least two other texts, one a sutta and the other a Jātaka that relates to the Mahā Sudassana Sutta as a lesson in impermanence. In **the Go,maya Sutta** (S 22.96), when a certain monk asks the Buddha if there us anything at all in our being that is *permanent*, the Buddha replies no, alluding to the mahā Sudassana’s great wealth and pleasures, that it all comes to an end.<sup>119</sup> We will also see this theme in **the Mahā Sudassana Jātaka** (J 95) shortly below.

**4.2.5 The refrain on the 84,000.** Finally, a remark on the “refrain on the 84,000” which appears a total of 6 times, with only slight instructive variations. The six occurrences of the refrain can be summarized as follows:

- (1) [§2.5] A prototypical list of the 14 sets of 84,000 possessions of king Mahā Sudassana.
- (2) [§2.10.2] Queen Subhaddā, realizing that the king is dying, appeals to him, reminding him of his pleasures so as to rouse his will to live.
- (3) [§2.11.2] The king, in response, instructs the queen the proper way of a deathbed friend, guiding him in the reflection on impermanence.
- (4) [§2.12.2] This is the most elaborate of the refrains, that is, queen Subhaddā carrying out the king’s instruction, reminding him of the impermanence of all his possessions.
- (5) [§2.13.4] The Buddha points out that he himself is king Mahā Sudassana in the past, so that he has enjoyed all those possessions.
- (6) [§2.15] The Buddha declares that he resorts to only one item of each of the 84,000, that is, he lives a frugal life despite the luxury.

These refrains are, as such, deliberate and instructive. They are a list of the symbols of power and pleasure, but by the same token are also occasions for the reflection on impermanence, as none of them ever lasts for long. Their repetitiveness, as we shall see, is purposeful, that is, as a part of the perception of impermanence [4.2.4].<sup>120</sup> **The Mahā Sudassana Jātaka** (J 95) is based on the famous “impermanence” verse, beginning, *Anicca vata saṅkhārā* (“All formations are impermanent...”), and where the Buddha, in response to Ānanda’s query for the Buddha’s reason for passing away in Kusi,nārā, highlights the grandeur of Kusā,vatī and Mahā Sudassana’s own instruction on impermanence to queen Subhaddā.<sup>121</sup>

## 5 A mythology of meditation

**5.1 THE DHARMAFARER’S PROGRESS.** The Mahā Sudassana Sutta, as has been proposed by Gethin, is “a mythic narrative of the Buddhist path” (2006:92). The royal city of Kusā,vatī, with all its facilities and pleasures, is an ideal and idyllic place for worldly life, where all the five senses are wholesomely fed, but it is still the mundane world of sense-pleasures (*kāma,dhātu*). The Dharma palace, on the other hand, is a kind of *half-way house* between the sense-world and the meditation realm, between the physical senses and dhyana. The facility and beauty of the palace make it an ideal ground to begin our retreat into deep meditation by letting go of the outside world: it is a supremely happy place of dazzling light [§1.30], that will dispel the gloom of craving and ignorance, at least temporarily.

Proper meditation begins in the pinnacled halls, of which there are 84,000. They are called “the pinnacled halls of great dispelling” because here the five mental hindrances are *dispelled*, resulting in dhyana. Presumably, each hall is vast enough to contain a great number of meditators, even all the city’s inhabitants. The large numbers do not matter—they simply refer to anyone and everyone who wants to meditate. Indeed, these chambers are “dhyana houses” (*jhān’āgāra*) [4.2.2], and to enter them is to attain to the form world (*rūpa,dhātu*) or form-bases (*rūp’āyatana*).

The king (everyman as meditator), first lays the foundation of charity (*dāna*) and moral virtue (*sīla*) to facilitate his movement away from the outer world of the body into the inner chambers of the mind. Pro-

<sup>119</sup> S 22.96/3:143-147 @ SD 36.16.

<sup>120</sup> For a meditation parable of the chariot, see **Mahā Narada Kassapa J** (J 544/6:252 f).

<sup>121</sup> J 95/1:391-393 @ SD 36.17.

per practice of *charity* generates profound joy, which helps in jumpstarting our meditation. *Moral virtue* is the preparation of the body and speech so that they do not hinder us in our meditative journey.

With such proper groundwork, the king easily attains the four dhyanas in the pinnacled hall of great dispelling, sitting on a *golden couch* [§2.3]. Emerging from this hall, he enters the golden pinnacled hall and sits on a *silver couch*, cultivating the four divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*) [§2.4]. I think the meditation sequence and the different couches are deliberate and meaningful. For most of us, breath meditation (the golden couch) is best done first because it is easy and provides us with a proper calm and clarity of mind to proceed to cultivating lovingkindness (the silver couch). Experienced meditators know that in the cultivation of lovingkindness, we may need to resolve some emotional issues that surface from the ancient depths of our minds. Mental calm and clarity certainly facilitate giving closure to such issues, if they do arise.

Having tasted *the four divine abodes* [§2.4], the king emerges from his meditation and puts those divine qualities into action by showing *his kindness and care to his animals* (such as the royal elephants) *and their human carers* [§2.6.1]. In due course, he even instructs his queen and those present in the perception of impermanence [§2.11]. With such excellent meditative practice, the king happily passes away and is fittingly reborn in the form-dhyana brahma world [§2.13].

## 5.2 VISUALITY AND MEDITATION IN THE MAHĀ SUDASSANA SUTTA

**5.2.1 The ideal environment for meditation.** The first half of Mahā Sudassana Sutta is devoted to a detailed description, or better, visualization, of **the royal city of Kusā,vātī** [§§1.3.2-1.23.5], as follows:

- §1.3 **Kusā,vātī** is described as being 270 km (168 mi) long and 158 km (98 mi) wide, and is crowded and busy like the celestial city of Ālakamandā.
- §1.4 It is surrounded by 7 walls, each of gold, silver, beryl, crystal, ruby, sapphire, and all the jewels.
- §1.5 It has 4 gates of gold, silver, beryl and crystal, each with 7 immense pillars, sunk 3-persons deep, and each of gold, silver, beryl, crystal, ruby, sapphire, and all the jewels.
- §1.6 It is encircled by 7 rows of palm trees, whose trunks, leaves and fruits are variously made of gold, silver, beryl and crystal. They produce delightful music, enjoyed by the people.
- [§§1.7-21] The wheel-turner's 7 jewels. (These sections seem to have been abruptly interpolated here.)
- §1.22 There are lotus lakes at every 100 bow-lengths between the (rows of) palm trees. The lakes are lined with bricks of gold, silver, beryl and crystal, and with stairways, railings, hand-rails and head-posts of the same precious materials.
- §1.23 The lakes have blue, white and red lotuses and water lilies, which anyone could use to make garlands. The king performs public charitable acts of giving beside the lakes.

The episode of the Dharma palace follows. The king's subjects wish to give him a huge donation, but he turns them down, saying that he has sufficient wealth from just taxes. The donors decide to use the funds to build a palace for the king. When Sakras learns of this, he directs the celestial builder, Vissa,kamma to build the Dharma palace for the king [§1.24]. **The Dharma palace and its 84,000 meditation halls** are described as follows:

- §1.25 Sakra instructs Vissa,kamma to build the Dharma palace for king Mahā Sudassana.
- §1.26 **The Dharma palace**, 11.26 km (7 mi) by 5.6 km (3.5 mi), aligned east-west, is built on a podium or raised foundation (3-persons high) with bricks of *gold, silver, beryl, and crystal*. It has 84,000 pillars; laid out with "boards" (seats); its 24 stairways have hand-rails and head-posts—all these are of the same 4 precious materials. It has 84,000 pinnacled halls and therein are couches, and both the halls and couches are of the same 4 materials. Outside each hall are palms with trunks, leaves and fruits of the same precious materials.
- §1.27 The king's own **pinnacled hall of great dispelling** has a palm grove before its entrance for the king's day-residence.

- §1.28 The palace is encircled by two railings with posts, hand-rails and head-posts, of silver and gold.
- §1.29 The palace is encircled by two networks—one of gold, the other of silver—of tinkling bells, whose musical sounds are enticingly delightful, so that people dance to them. [cf §1.32]
- §1.30 The Dharma palace as a whole is dazzlingly bright and difficult to look at.
- §1.31 Before the Dharma palace is **the Dharma lotus lake**, 11.26 km (7 mi) by 5.6 km (3.5 mi) (the same size as the palace), parallel to it. The lake has 24 stairways with posts, hand-rails and head-posts of the same precious materials, and is encircled by two railings, one of gold, the other of silver, and they have posts, hand-rails and head-posts of gold and silver.
- §1.32 The Dharma lake is encircled by 7 rows of palm trees, each row variously of gold, silver, beryl, crystal, ruby, sapphire, and all the jewels. Encircling each lake are palms with trunks, leaves and fruits of the same 7 precious materials. They produce enticingly delightful sounds, so that people dance to them. [cf §1.29]
- §1.33 When the Dharma palace and the Dharma lake are completed, the king makes offerings to worthy brahmins and ascetics.

Two textual features are especially prominent here: the first is a profoundly rich and sense-appealing *visuality*, and secondly, there is much *repetitiveness* in the descriptions. Both these features have to do with what is clearly the purpose of the Mahā Sudassana Sutta: it is meant to be a visualization exercise as a preparation for deeper meditation, including dhyana.

**5.2.2 Inspirational meditations.** The Mahā Sudassana Sutta is a *meditation text*: a substantial portion of it deals with the images and activity of meditation. In fact, it belongs to a group of helpful contemplative methods known as the “inspiring meditations,” comprising these six well known meditations, or more specifically, recollections (*anussati*), that is to say,

- |                                       |                        |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| (1) the recollection of the Buddha,   | <i>buddhānussati</i> , |
| (2) the recollection of the Dharma,   | <i>dhammānussati</i> , |
| (3) the recollection of the Sangha,   | <i>saṅghānussati</i> , |
| (4) the recollection of moral virtue, | <i>sīlānussati</i> ,   |
| (5) the recollection of the charity,  | <i>cāgānussati</i> ,   |
| (6) the recollection of the devas.    | <i>devatānussati</i> . |

These six meditations are also the streamwinner’s lifelong practice (*nissaya, vihāra*).<sup>122</sup> They are called “inspiring meditations” because they are helpful in wholesomely energizing us into doing the main practices of breath meditation and the cultivation of lovingkindness. Technically, they only lead to “access concentration” (*upacāra samādhi*), that is, the threshold of concentration. At this point, our breathing is so refined that if we are to “let go” of it just a bit more, we will attain dhyana.<sup>123</sup> The breath, in other words, is our mind-tool for overcoming mental hindrances that may arise in mental cultivation.

For their best effect, we of course need to prepare for these six methods. For four of them—that is, 1, 2, 3 and 6—some sutta study and reflection on the three jewels and sutta accounts on devas are necessary.<sup>124</sup> For methods 4 and 5, we need to actually try our best in keeping to the five precepts (or even the eight precepts, if the occasion allows),<sup>125</sup> and to practise joyful giving at appropriate times in an proper

<sup>122</sup> See eg (Agata, phala) Mahānāma S (A 6.10/3:284-288) = SD 15.3; see also AA 3:337 f. For a set of 10 recollections, see *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (Fig 8.1).

<sup>123</sup> On access concentration, see SD 13.1 (3.1d (7)); *Nimitta*, SD 19.7 (3); *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (Diag 8.1); BDict: *kasina, samādhi*. On attaining dhyana, see *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (8.7).

<sup>124</sup> In practical terms, if we have faith in any non-Buddhist beliefs in God, gods, angels or some kind of wholesome spiritual being, they can be similarly used as a preliminary to inspire joyful faith in us, and then go on to the breath meditation or the cultivation of lovingkindness.

<sup>125</sup> See eg *Veḷu, dvāreyya S* (S 55.7/5:352-356), SD 1.5.

manner.<sup>126</sup> The idea is to focus on some spiritual moments in our lives, visualizing ourselves in those wholesome actions, and feeling their joy or peace.<sup>127</sup>

The Mahā Sudassana Sutta is a colourful and inspiring narrative of a wheel-turning king, Mahā Sudassana, and his careful preparations for meditation and how he practises dhyana and the divine abodes. The detailed descriptions of the Dharma palace and its vicinity are an idyllic vision of joy that is meant to inspire mental peace and happiness as a basis for good meditation.<sup>128</sup>

**5.2.3 Recollection of the Buddha.** In a way, the Mahā Sudassana Sutta is a text on *buddhānussati* (recollection of the Buddha).<sup>129</sup> After all, the Sutta is well known as an elaboration on the Buddha's brief statement to Ānanda on the significance of Kusi,nārā, as recorded in the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta (D 16).<sup>130</sup> It is a narrative related by the Buddha on his deathbed, and is the story of Mahā Sudassana's own happy death and rebirth in the brahma world. Hence, it is also a reflection on impermanence [4.2.4].

The Mahā Sudassana Sutta, in a masterly play on irony. The narrative first builds up Mahā Sudassana's glory and majesty as a wheel-turning king, then his charity and spirituality, and finally his death and heavenly rebirth. The king's glory and majesty are celebrated in the description of his royal city of Kusā,vātī [§§1.3-6], the details of his seven jewels [§§1.7-17], and his four charismatic qualities [§§1.18-21].

He builds fabulous lotus lakes and a palm grove in Kusā,vātī for the benefit of the people. For the purpose of meditation, he builds the Dharma palace with a lotus lake before it, and there he gives offerings to worthy holy men. His gardens are filled with musical bells which delight the people [§§1.22-33].

Recollecting his moral virtue, he enters the pinnacled hall of great dispelling to begin his meditation retreat, attains the four dhyanas, and goes on to cultivate the four immeasurables (the divine abodes). When his queen and her entourage visit him, he reminds her of the impermanence of their lives and possessions, and then passes peacefully away. [§§2.1-13]

All this mirrors the Buddha's own final moments in Kusi,nārā, where the Buddha reminds Ānanda of his own impermanence. Having taught the Dharma for 45 years, the Buddha successfully establishes the fourfold assembly of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. He passes away with his Dharma work fulfilled. Both king Mahā Sudassana and the Buddha pass away in a dignified and joyful manner. Having lived a good life, they each enjoy a good death.

### 5.3 MEDITATIVE VISUALIZATION

**5.3.1 No word for “visualization” in early Buddhism.** A major difficulty in taking the Mahā Sudassana Sutta as a *visualization*, as suggested by Gethin, is that the notion does not seem to be supported by any text, canonical or commentarial (2006:96). The English term “**visualization**,” with which we are now so familiar has no clear Pali or Sanskrit equivalent. In scholarly works on proto-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna texts, the notion of visualization is mostly *inferred* from contexts of “recollection of the Buddha” (*buddhānussati*) that refer to the appearance of the Buddha or past buddhas, or by accounts of practitioners mentally “seeing” them represented by simplex forms of the verbal roots of “seeing,” that is, √PAŚ or √DRŚ.

Even in Vajrayāna, “visualization” is a neologism that is usually conveyed by the common words related to “meditation,” such as the causative (*vi*)*bhāvayati*, “having as its object” (a buddha-image, *buddha,bimba*). All this has led Gethin to conclude that there is no specialized word or expression in Buddhist Sanskrit for “visualization.” “Moreover,” he adds, “the notion of ‘visualization’ is somewhat loose, ranging from having some kind of vision, to deliberately cultivating a specific prescribed image.” (id).

<sup>126</sup> On charity or giving, see eg (Sumana) **Dāna S** (A 6.37/3:336 f), SD 22.1.

<sup>127</sup> The texts and explanations for these 6 methods are found in SD 15, incl **Sambādh'okāsa S** (A 6.26/3:314 f), SD 15.6. On moral virtue (the precepts), see eg **Veḷu,dvāreyya S** (S 55.7/5:352-356), SD 1.5. On the importance of joy in meditation, see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (14)3.

<sup>128</sup> On the 6 inspiring meditations, see further (Agata,phala) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10/3:284-288) @ SD 15.3 (2).

<sup>129</sup> On the recollection of the Buddha, see **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7.

<sup>130</sup> D 16.5.17-18/2:146 f, SD 9.



### 5.3.2 Visualization: A very brief history

5.3.2.1 EARLY BUDDHA RECOLLECTION. **Paul Harrison**, in his article, “Commemoration and identification in *buddhānussmṛti*” (1992), gives a short but useful survey of Buddhist visualization practice. His article centres around the “recollection of the Buddha” (*buddhānussati*), which is rooted in the early Buddhist texts, but is adapted into such surprisingly new and wide-ranging methods as the *nenbutsu* (Chinese *nianfo*), the ritual invocation of Amitābha Buddha [6.4.2], and the Tibetan practice of “deity yoga.”

Those who are faith-inclined might recite the Buddha recollection or visualize the Buddha as an expressly *psychotropic* (psychologically effective) or *apotropaic* (magically efficacious) undertaking.<sup>131</sup> Practitioners of early Buddhist meditation, however, would invariably use the *buddhānussati* as a consciousness-altering means that is, by inspiring in us some level of joy through the recollection, we would displace a distraction or any of the five mental hindrances.<sup>132</sup> In other words, in early Buddhism, it is the Buddha’s virtues that are recollected: he is meditated on in the abstract, never as a physical person.

5.3.2.2 THE BUDDHA RECOLLECTED IN PHYSICAL FORM. One of the earliest textual evidence we have of recollecting the Buddha in a physical form is probably found in Upatissa’s **Vimutti,magga** (3<sup>rd</sup> century CE), where he prescribes that “[a]ccording to the Netti Sutta,<sup>133</sup> if a man wishes to meditate on the Buddha, he should worship buddha images and such other objects.”<sup>134</sup> Harrison cites a **Visuddhi,magga** (5<sup>th</sup> century) passage where the Buddha’s *body* is reflected on as having the 32 superhuman marks, the 80 minor marks, and other excellent qualities, despite all of which, he still passes away.<sup>135</sup> But he concedes that this is only part of a *reflection on death* rather than a Buddha-recollection proper (1992: 219).

Outside of the Pali tradition, we do find evidence of the visual aspects of meditation in non-Mahāyāna texts. Some scholarly studies of accounts of *buddhānussmṛti* in the Chinese **Ekottar’āgama** (accounts of the use of an image in meditation)<sup>136</sup> and the **Mahā,vastu** (accounts of the Buddha’s appearances)<sup>137</sup> by **Paul Harrison**<sup>138</sup> and by **Nobuyoshi Yamabe**<sup>139</sup> are worth closer study.

The Ekottar’āgama passage (EĀ 3.1, late 4<sup>th</sup> century) declares that *buddhānussmṛti* is one practice for realizing all spiritual goals and recommends that practitioners contemplate on the buddha image with unbroken gaze, recalling the Buddha’s body and countenance, and then his moral and mental virtues, arranged in the traditional listing of “moral virtue, concentration, wisdom, and the knowledge and vision of liberation” (*śīla,sāmadhi,prajñā,vimukti,jñāna.darśana*).<sup>140</sup> However, there is here no reference to any of the virtues of the Buddha as found in early Buddhism.

Another excellent example of a visualization of the Buddha’s physical body is found in **the Mahā,vastu**, a Sanskrit work (its oldest parts go back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE) of the Lokottara,vādins, a Mahā-saṅghika subsect (who regard the Buddha as being divine).<sup>141</sup> From such evidences, we can surmise that after the Buddha’s time, Buddhists must have been practising a form of visualization of the Buddha’s physical body.

5.3.2.3 MEETING A PRESENT BUDDHA. **Harrison** has found convincing evidence of this in his study of **the Pratyutpanna,buddha,samṁukhāvasthista,samādhī Sūtra** (1990), “the discourse on the sama-

<sup>131</sup> See *Buddhānussati*, SD 15.7 (1) & also Harrison 1992:219.

<sup>132</sup> See *Nīvaraṇa*, SD 32.1 (2.1).

<sup>133</sup> Lit *netri sutara*. This cannot be the Netti-p.pakaraṇa, where the only ref to *buddhānussati* (Nett 296/54) does not mention any such visualization.

<sup>134</sup> Ehara, Soma & Kheminda (trs), *The Path of Freedom*, Colombo, 1961:141.

<sup>135</sup> Vism 8.23/234 (Vism:P 269 f).

<sup>136</sup> EĀ 3.1 = T2.554a7-b9.

<sup>137</sup> Mvst 3:425 f.

<sup>138</sup> Harrison 1978:37 f, 1992:219 f.

<sup>139</sup> Yamabe 1999:127-158. He however argues that the ref to the use of a Buddha image in Ehara’s tr of Vimutti,-magga is a result of a misunderstanding of the Chinese (129-132).

<sup>140</sup> For full text, see Harrison 1978:37 f.

<sup>141</sup> Mvst 3:425 f; tr Mvst:J 3:426.

dhi of direct encounter with the buddhas of the present” (hereafter Pratyutpanna Sūtra).<sup>142</sup> Here, practitioners attempt to have audience not with the historical Sakyamuni, but the myriad buddhas of the present, of whom Amitābha is the preeminent. He adds, “These buddhas are simply idealized clones of Śākyamuni transposed to different world systems.” (1992: 220)

In this practice, we see the visualization of the Buddha’s physical form being added to the original core of the ten epithets of the *buddhānusmṛti*. The visualization is effected primarily through the contemplation of the 32 superhuman marks.<sup>143</sup> This detailed visualization is helped by imagining the Buddha’s body as resembling an image in two or three dimensions. Lastly, he is visualized as teaching the Dharma, seated in the midst of an assembly. In doing so, it is believed that the meditator would receive teachings directly from the Buddha himself. In due course, such visualizations are extended to “celestial”<sup>144</sup> bodhisattvas, the most popular of whom is Avalokiteśvara and his various forms.

5.3.2.4 AVALOKITEŚVARA. The name *avalokiteśvara* has been discussed in some useful detail elsewhere.<sup>145</sup> Here we shall briefly examine how the term is related to meditation. Scholars like Nobuyoshi YAMABE have suggested that the Sanskrit *avalokayati* or *vyavalokayati*, often translated as “survey,”<sup>146</sup> should be seen as part of the technical vocabulary of meditative visualization, cognate with the Pali verbs *oloketi* (“he looks down (from above)”) and *apaloketi* (“he looks over”)—both with the senses of survey, examine, contemplate, inspect etc.

Yamabe himself notes that the verb is used for surveying the initial object in the practice of meditation on the impurities (*asubha bhāvanā*) and the kasinas (*kaṣiṇa*).<sup>147</sup> Clearly the earliest depictions of Avalokiteśvara, even in his Chinese forms, are closely connected with meditation on the five aggregates (how they are empty, etc). The word *avalokiteśvara* was resolved as *avalokita* (“who surveys”) + *īśvara* (“the lord”), that is, “the lord who inspects (the aggregates).”<sup>148</sup> It is a text reminding us to reflect on the true nature of our existence.

As the visual embodiment of compassion, indeed of the four divine abodes, Avalokiteśvara is, for example, depicted with six arms and eleven heads. This meditation image reminds us that compassion must pervade all our six faculties (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking), and we must pervade compassion in every direction: the front, the right, the back, the left, above, below, and of course towards ourselves, too (otherwise the centre is hollow).<sup>149</sup>

In due course, it was popularized to become a magical text, with a power of its own, or technically, the power of sound, that is, the chant. Avalokiteśvara became Guānyīn, “the regarnder of sound (that is, the cries of suffering).” Today, Guanyin devotees see her almost exclusively as an apotropaic (averting of bad luck, etc), and effectively forgetting or disregarding both his meditative and visualization aspects.<sup>150</sup>

5.3.2.5 VAJRAYĀNA VISUALIZATION. Vajrayāna visualization developed the practice even further, with greater innovations. In what is now known as “**deity yoga**,”<sup>151</sup> rich imagery, including sexual ones,

<sup>142</sup> The first Chin tr was made by the Indo-Scythian Lokakṣema in 179 CE: see Harrison 1978. For further nn, see Harrison 1992:233 n30.

<sup>143</sup> See **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30/3:142-179), SD 36.9 (4).

<sup>144</sup> “Celestial” (adj; n), when applied to buddhas and bodhisattvas, is an academic neologism which qualifies (adj) or refers to such a being (n), who are beyond our space-time reality, inhabiting their own sacred or mythical worlds. Sometimes the term “cosmic” is also used.

<sup>145</sup> **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b.1 (1.3.2.1).

<sup>146</sup> Eg Piyasilo, *Avalokiteśvara: Origin, manifestations and meanings*, Malaysia, 1991a:1 f; J C Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 1991:31; Gethin 2006:100.

<sup>147</sup> Eg Vism 3.119/114, 6.50/185 f.

<sup>148</sup> See eg Donald S Lopez, Jr, *The Heart Sutra Explained: Indian and Tibetan Commentaries*, NY: SUNY Press, 1988.

<sup>149</sup> On the directional cultivation of the divine abodes, see eg **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65.15a/1:192), SD 35.4a.

<sup>150</sup> See J C Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 1991:31-44; Yü Chün-fang, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*. New York: Columbia Univ Press, 2001:13-15, 37-43, 269.

<sup>151</sup> Tib *lha'i rnal 'byor*; Skt *devatā,yoga*, which includes a sadhana (*sādhana*), a personal ritual practice which include meditation, mantra chanting (sometimes with the help of a beads or *japa,mālā*), guru-worship or puja to a

are used in two basic types of practices: the visualization of the chosen deity in front of oneself, and the visualization of oneself as the chosen deity (or *yidam*).<sup>152</sup> Such elaborate and intimate practices, parts of even more elaborate “means of accomplishment” (*sādhana*), are believed to help the practitioner in strengthening his resolve to become a buddha in some future time. Again, such ideas or practices are not found in early Buddhism, certainly not in terms of the proper practice of the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma.

## 6 The development of Buddhist visualization and related practices

### 6.1 VISUALIZATION IN BUDDHIST MEDITATION

**6.1.1 Texts to be performed.** Scholars have early noticed that the Mahā Sudassana Sutta descriptions of Kusā,vātī are reminiscent of the Mahāyāna paradises such as those described in the Sukhā,vātī,vyūha Sūtras.<sup>153</sup> **Paul Harrison**, in his article, “Mediums and messages: reflections on the production Mahāyāna sūtras” (2003), explains how early or proto-Mahāyāna had adapted the mainstream practice of *buddhānu-smṛti* to include the visualization of buddhas and their worlds, such as those described in **the Sukhā.vati,-vyūha Sūtras**.

Harrison points out that the description of these worlds are often long-winded and tedious to modern sensibilities. The Sutra, for example, describes at length how the that trees that grow in Sukhā,vātī are made of 7 precious substances, that is, gold (*suvarṇa*), silver (*rūpya*), beryl (*vaidūrya*), crystal (*sphaṭika*), sapphire (*musara,galva*), ruby (*lohita,mukta*) and emerald (*aśma,garbha*),<sup>154</sup> which clearly echoes the Mahā Sudassana Sutta:

There, Ānanda, **the trees** made of gold have roots, trunks, shoots, branches, flowers, and **leaves** made of gold, but fruits made of *silver*. **The trees** made of silver have flowers, leaves, branches, limbs, trunks, and roots, made only of silver, but **fruits** made of *beryl*.<sup>155</sup> [6.4.1]

(Sukhāvati,vyūha Sūtra, ed Muller & Nanjio, 34; Vaidya 235) [6.3.1]

“Tedium,” quips Harrison, “like beauty, turns out to be in the eye of the beholder, but possibly not in the ear of the listener: part of ‘performing’ the text in the way intended almost certainly entails reciting out loud, rather than scanning it quickly and silently for information” (2003:122 & n11). In other words, this repetitiveness is very much like the way in which the monks in conclave on an uposatha day would listen to a recital of the Pāṭimokkha.<sup>156</sup>

**L S Cousins**, in his review of *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, a translation by Nyana-moli and Bodhi, gives an instructive feedback on the importance of keeping (and reading) the repetitive passages (or *peyyāla*) of the suttas:

Although there are obvious advantages to having the whole work in one volume, especially for the newcomer, the disadvantage is the systematic elimination of repetition. Many readers may see this as a gain but it does amount to the deliberate removal of a meditative element from many

deity, a sacrifice (*yajña*), and in rare cases, even mortification of the body, or performing the sadhana in a cremation ground or cemetery. All these are, of course, later developments, mostly influenced by popular religion (such as Saivism), and should never be practised without proper guidance, if ever practised at all. See **(Tathāgata) Acchariya S 1** (A 4.127), SD 36.15 (3.3).

<sup>152</sup> See eg Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV), *Deity Yoga in Action and Performance Tantra*, tr & ed J Hopkins, NY, 1987; F D Lessing & A Wayman, *Introduction to Buddhist Tantric Systems*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Delhi, 1980 esp 159-187; & David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, London, 1987:130 f, 235-243. See also Harrison 1992:225 f.

<sup>153</sup> See eg T W Rhys Davids (1910), D:RD 2:198.

<sup>154</sup> On emerald, see 6.4.1 n on *aśma,garbha* (in Sukhāvātī,vyūha ch 16 quote).

<sup>155</sup> *Tatr'ānanda suvarṇa,mayānām vrkṣāṇām suvarṇa,mayāni mūla,skandha,viṭapa,śākhā,patra,puṣpāṇi phalāni rūpya,mayāni | rūpya,mayānām vrkṣāṇām rūpya,mayāni eva mūla,skandha,viṭapa,śākhā,patra,puṣpāṇi phalāni vaidūrya,mayāni |* (Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra 16,Vaidya 235; Ashikaga ed reads underscored as *sauvarṇa...* and *pattra* ... throughout). Sources: [http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1\\_sanskr/4\\_rellit/buddh/bsu033\\_u.htm](http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskr/4_rellit/buddh/bsu033_u.htm) & <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe49/sbe4924.htm>. See Gethin 2006:95.

<sup>156</sup> See Gethin 1992:166.

suttas. In the original language, when the suttas are chanted rather than read, there is an effect upon the mind which is very much part of their traditional purpose. Moreover, the emphasis is often changed quite critically: when a phrase that is repeated in the original ten times is given only once in translation, it ceases to be a central part which is always retained in memory. The result is that what the sutta tries to stress as important becomes much less noticeable in translation.

(Cousins, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4 1997: 261 f)<sup>157</sup>

**Paul Harrison** echoes the same sentiment in saying that such texts are not so much to be read as they are to be *performed*:

This gives us a new way of reading the text, as a template for visualization, the sheer detail of which now begins to make sense. What we are left with on the printed page resembles the wiring diagram for a television set, of interest only to electricians, baffling and tediously complex to anyone else. But when we “do” the text rather than read it, when we perform its operations ourselves, it suddenly becomes a little more interesting. (2003:122)

Although Harrison directs his remarks to early or proto-Mahāyāna meditation, we could well apply such a practice to the Mahā Sudassana Sutta, too. Cousins, besides noting the vitality of textual repetitiveness, further voices that the Sutta should indeed be taken as instructions in *visualization* (Gethin 2006:95 n67).

**6.1.2 Instructions on visualizing.** However, we do not have any discourse or passage in the early Buddhist texts, nor in such commentarial works as the *Vimutti,magga*, the *Visuddhi,magga* or the *Abhidharma,kośa*, that specifically describe or instruct visualization practices. However, if we carefully examine instructive meditation passages in the early texts, we would notice that many of the practices described involve an important level of visual effort. We clearly see such a visualization in *body-based meditations* as described in **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10) and other meditation suttas.

Take the description of the perception of foulness,<sup>158</sup> for example, where the Sutta instructs as follows:

Just as if there were a bag, open at both ends, full of various kinds of grain, such as hill-rice, paddy, green gram,<sup>159</sup> kidney-beans, sesame, husked rice,

and a man with good sight were to open the bag and examine them, saying: ‘This is hill-rice; this is paddy; this is green gram; this is kidney-bean; this is sesame; this is husked rice,’

—so, too, a monk reviews this very body, wrapped in skin and full of various impurities, from the soles of the feet upwards and from the crown of the head downwards:

“In this body there are

head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin;

flesh, [D 2:294] sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys;

heart, liver, membranes (around the lungs), spleen, lungs;

large intestines, small intestines, stomach-contents, faeces[, brain];

bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat;

tears, grease, saliva, snot, oil of the joints, urine.”

(M 10,10/1:57), SD 13.3

Or, the instructions on the nine charnel-ground meditations:<sup>160</sup>

(1) Furthermore, bhikshus, *just as if*<sup>161</sup> he were to see bodily remains [a corpse] thrown aside in a charnel-ground,

<sup>157</sup> See also **The oral tradition of the early Buddhists**, SD 58.1.

<sup>158</sup> In the Suttas, this practice is called *asubha,saññā* (perception of foulness). The term *asubha,nimitta* (the sign of foulness) in Comys, refers to one or other of the 10 foul objects, ie bodily remains in one of the 10 stages of decomposition (Vism 6.1-11/178 f). On details of practice, see **Kāya,gatā,sati S** (M 119), SD 12.21 Intro (5). See also **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.29/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*).

<sup>159</sup> Or, mung beans.

<sup>160</sup> Sometimes called *sāvathikā* (cemetery) meditations: see V 3:36; D 2:295 f; A 3:268, 323; J 1:146; Pv 3.5.2.



one, two, three days dead, bloated, livid [discoloured], festering,

—so, too, he compares<sup>162</sup> this very body with that, thinking:

“Such is the nature of this body: it will become like that—this is unavoidable.”

(2) Or, again, bhikkhus, *just as if* he were to see bodily remains [a corpse] thrown aside in a charnel-ground, being eaten by crows, or being eaten by hawks, or being eaten by vultures, or being eaten by dogs, or being eaten by jackals, or being eaten by various worms and bugs;

—so, too, he compares this very body with that, thinking:

“Such is the nature of this body: it will become like that—this is unavoidable.”

Or, again, bhikkhus, *just as if* he were to see bodily remains [bones] thrown aside in a charnel-ground,

(3) a skeleton with flesh and blood, connected by sinews,

(4) a skeleton, fleshless, smeared with blood, connected by sinews,

(5) a skeleton, flesh and blood all gone, connected by sinews,

(6)<sup>163</sup> random disconnected bones, scattered in all directions, a hand-bone here, a foot-bone there, a shin-bone here, a rib there, a thigh-bone here, [D 2:297] a pelvic bone there, a back-bone here, a shoulder-bone there, a neck-bone here, a jaw-bone there, a tooth here, a skull there;

—so, too, he compares this very body with that:

“Such is the nature of this body: it will become like that—this is unavoidable.”

Or, again, bhikkhus, *just as if* he were to see bodily remains thrown aside in a charnel-ground,

(7) the bones bleached, looking like conch-shells,

(8) the bones piled up, over a year old,

(9) the bones reduced to dust;

—so, too, he compares this very body with that:

“Such is the nature of this body: it will become like that—this is unavoidable.”

(M 10,14-30/1:58 f) @ SD 13.3, refrains omitted)

The phrase, “**just as if**” (*seyyathā pi*) or “as though,” suggests that these meditations “need not be based upon an actual encounter with bodily remains in the state of decay described, but can be performed as an imaginative exercise” (M:ÑB 1192 n150). **The Visuddhi, magga** details how a meditator can gain the first *vision* of a decaying corpse in a charnel ground and subsequently develop this vision while meditating in his dwelling.<sup>164</sup>

Furthermore, **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) gives a list of the 8 bases for mastery,<sup>165</sup> a set of kasina meditations [4.2.2], that is, visualization practices based on gazing *on a meditation device* (*kaṣiṇa*), the last four of which are *colours*. The fifth base for mastery, on the colour **blue**, runs as follows:

Not perceiving forms internally [within oneself], one sees forms *externally*, that are blue [*indigo*], of blue colour, blue in appearance, with a blue glow.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>161</sup> *Puna ca, param bhikkhave bhikkhu seyyāthā pi passeyya sarīram sīvathikāya chaḍḍitam...* When *seyyāthā, pi* starts off a passage, as a rule, it presents a parable or simile. Here, embedded in the sentence, it clearly modifies *passeyya*, “were to see, should see.”

<sup>162</sup> “He compares,” *upasamharati*, see Intro (3.9b).

<sup>163</sup> For variant readings, see PTS ed, D 2:296 f.

<sup>164</sup> Vism 6.12-69/180-190, esp §§6.62-64.

<sup>165</sup> “Bases of mastery” or “spheres of transcendence” (*abhibhāyatana*, Skt *abhibhv-āyatana* = *abhibhū* + *āyatana*, D 16.3.24/2:110, 33.3.1(10)/3:260; M 77.23/2:13 f; S 35.96/4:77; A 8.65/4:305 f, 8.90/349; Nm 143; Dhs §§235-247; DhsA 191). This teaching was given to Udāyi in **Mahā Sakul’udāyi S** (M 77.23/2:13 f). These are powers gained through *kaṣiṇa* (Skt *kṛtsna*) meditation as means of transcending the sense-sphere. In **Parihāna Dhamma S** (S 35.96), the term is applied to 6 “mastered bases” (*cha abhibhā’āyatanāni*) and refer to the mastery of the senses: when a sense-object impinges on the sense-base, “there do not arise in him evil unwholesome states, nor any memories and intentions connected with the mental fetters” (S 35.96/4:76 f). See *Buddhist Dictionary: abhibhāyatana & Ency Bsm*, sv; also Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation*, 2006: 93.

<sup>166</sup> On blue (*nīla*) *kaṣiṇa*, and yellow (*pīṭa*), copper-red (*lohita*) and white (*odāta*), see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (9.2).

Just as a flax flower that is blue, of blue colour, blue in appearance, with a blue glow; or just like Benares cloth smoothened on both sides, that is blue, blue in appearance, with a blue glow; even so, not perceiving forms internally, one seeks forms externally, blue, of blue colour, blue in appearance, with a blue glow.

By mastering [transcending] them, one perceives thus, “I know, I see.”

(D 16,3.29/2:110) @ SD 9

The same is then said of the colours *yellow*, *red* and *white* respectively. These colours are said to be suitable and useful for a meditator with a hating character, and, properly done, these kasina visualizations are able to bring us into the dhyanas.<sup>167</sup> The Mahā Sudasana Sutta, too, recounts how the king himself attains the four dhyanas [§2.3].

**6.1.3 A nimitta as a visual object.** An interesting aspect of deeper meditation, especially as a sign of deep focus or a precursor to dhyana, is the “meditation sign” (*nimitta*). There are at least two important meanings of *nimitta* here. The first refers to an *external* meditation object, such as a colour [6.1.2]. The second meaning refers to a *mental* phenomena that is actually a reflection of our own mental state in deep meditation. When our mind is free from the mental hindrances and fully focussed, then such a *nimitta* may appear as a brilliant clear light that floods our whole being. It is a sign of dhyana.<sup>168</sup>

Amongst the seven jewels of the wheel-turner listed in the Mahā Sudassana Sutta is **the wheel jewel** (*cakka, ratana*) or divine wheel jewel (*dibba, cakka, ratana*) [3.1], which is in fact *the key emblem* of the wheel-turner. Its importance is attested by the fact that the Commentary deals with it in some detail (DA 617-619). It says that when the divine wheel appears in the sky, it is so bright that those who see it think that “it is a second moon or sun rising!”<sup>169</sup>

The king is said to be rapturous when he sees the blazing wheel jewel. This is clearly an allegory of the arising of the dhyanic experience, marked by the appearance of the counter-image or counterpart-sign (*paṭibhāga nimitta*) and attended by zest and joy.<sup>170</sup> In fact, king Mahā Sudassana’s Kusā, vātī, especially the Dharma palace, is made of various colourful and bright visual objects, such as gold, silver, beryl, crystal and so on, which can all serve as meditation objects. [§1.4 etc]

**6.1.4 The mandala.** The wheel symbolism features prominently in the wheel-turner narrative in the Mahā Sudassana Sutta. Here, the wheel is a “vertical” and *temporal* symbol. It appears mid-air, “rising in the east like a full moon or the sun. Its sound is audible for 12 leagues around, and it is visible for a league” [§1.7.2]. In other words, it is also a *divine* symbol.

A wheel, on the other hand, when placed on its side or hub on the ground, becomes another kind of symbol: it becomes a meditation symbol. The “horizontal” wheel is a *spatial* symbol known as a *mandala*, anglicized as “mandala” [3.1.1]. It is a *psychocosmogram*, a body-mind diagram that we gaze at or visualize as an aid in certain types of meditation, especially in Vajrayāna.<sup>171</sup>

The canonical root of the mandala as a visualization device is arguably the kasina disc<sup>172</sup> [4.2.2]. There is no reference in the early texts to the mandala or to visualization as a meditation. One possible explanation for the rise of this new approach was from the reasoning that if, in kasina meditation, an element (earth, water, fire, or wind) could be made to materialize or re-assemble, surely, a similar contemplation on a mandala would have the same effect. or, at least such a contemplation would conjure up a sustained virtual image of such a dimension.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>167</sup> For a full list of kasina meditations, see *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (Fig 8.1) & (9.2).

<sup>168</sup> See *Nimitta*, SD 19.7.

<sup>169</sup> DA 2:619; MA 4:217.

<sup>170</sup> See *Samadhi*, SD 33.1a (3.1). On zest, see *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (9.6-7). On dhyana, see *Dhyana*, SD 8.4 esp (5).

<sup>171</sup> See eg *Paul Mus* 1998, on his study of the symbolism of the Borobudur temple in Indonesia.

<sup>172</sup> On the kasina disc, see *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (9.2).

<sup>173</sup> Another symbolic application of the mandala is the stupa (P *thūpa*), or reliquary cairn, which is a three-dimensional manifestation of the mandala, incorporating the 4 primary elements: see *Mus* 1998:341. For refs, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stupa>.

The rich descriptions of the fabulous royal city of Kusā,vātī, with its gardens and lakes, and of the Dharma palace, its meditation halls, and their surroundings of gardens and lakes, are the earliest example of some kind of visualization practice. However, this is not expressly stated in the Mahā Sudassana Sutta itself. Perhaps the Sutta compilers themselves did not intend it to be a visualization meditation, but simply as *an allegoric study of impermanence and meditation*. Such a text, when recited or heard, especially the repetitive passages, evoke two important ideas:

- (1) Mahā Sudassana's fabulous possessions and their impermanence, and
- (2) the idyllic sceneries, capable of inspiring joy that launches the meditator into deeper meditation, such as the mindfulness of breath or the cultivation of lovingkindness.

## 6.2 LATER INDIAN DEVELOPMENTS

**6.2.1 Hindu influence on Buddhism.** Following the Buddha's death, meditation either became more of a ritual or was altogether set aside for other forms of religious practice, often innovations under the influence of other religions.<sup>174</sup> The meditation mythology of the Mahā Sudassana Sutta, for example, came to be understood in a literal sense as *a visualization practice*. This development was of course unplanned, but occurred almost naturally, determined by internal conditions and outside influences.

Let us now list some of **the internal influences** that distracted the post-Buddha Buddhists away from a meditation-based training. Firstly, there were very few meditation teachers around. Most of the competent practitioners probably resorted to remote dwellings, while the urban monastics could not progress well in their meditation due to a busy settled and organized monastic life, constant socializing with the laity, and a growing professional preoccupation with academic learning and materialism.<sup>175</sup>

In due course, with the rise of academic learning, the shift away from the contemplative increased, especially with the rise of *philosophical* Mahāyāna in the early centuries. Finally, with the rise of *Tantric ritualism* and *guru devotion*, the meditation became unrecognizable, a far cry from what was taught and practised in early Buddhism, which was systematically denigrated as “the inferior vehicle” (*hīna,yāna*), or as “the middle way,” while the new Buddhism was the “supreme way.”<sup>176</sup>

One of the most important reasons for the rise of Mahāyāna theism, the supreme buddhas and cosmic bodhisattvas, is a *psychological* one. The Mahāyāna Buddhists, and, to some extent, the non-Mahāyāna Buddhists, too, had *difficulty accepting the Buddha's death*. The **Mahā,saṅghika**, for example, regarded the Buddha as “supramundane” (*lokottara*), which literally means “beyond the world,” *not* of this world (*laukika*). The branch of the Mahāsaṅghika that upheld such a dogma was known as the Lokottara,vāda (the Supramundane School).<sup>177</sup>

However, the notion of an apotheosized Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, did not catch on with the Mahāyāna. The ideas of *divinity* and *transcendentalism*, however, did become popular with them. The Mahāyāna imaginaire populated other worlds and parallel universes with buddhas, bodhisattvas and other beings. Using their innovative approaches to ancient meditation theories and methods, they introduced narratives of meeting or invoking such supreme beings.<sup>178</sup>

**The external influences** on the post-Buddha Buddhists helped spawn remarkably new Buddhisms, or richly fed the innovations of the more imaginatively driven Buddhists.<sup>179</sup> With the rise of Hinduism, beginning from the 8<sup>th</sup> century (or earlier),<sup>180</sup> Mahāyāna Buddhism responded by incorporating Hindu, espe-

<sup>174</sup> See eg **Cakka,vatti Siha,nāda S** (D 26) @ SD 36.10 (4.1); **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 39) @ SD 36.9 (6.7).

<sup>175</sup> See eg **Anāgata Bhaya Ss 3-4** (A 5.79-80/3:105-110); **Sugata Vinaya S** (A 4.160/2:147-149). See **The Dharma-ending Age**, SD 1.10 (3).

<sup>176</sup> See **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 (1.8.2).

<sup>177</sup> See **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (3.3.1).

<sup>178</sup> See eg Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, London, Routledge, 1989:18-20, 150-152, 156, 168-171, 227.

<sup>179</sup> We see a similar driving force at work with urban Buddhism, such as those in Singapore and Malaysia, eg where Buddhist professionals and the affluent try to incorporate academic and professional learning or evangelical influences (esp their God-idea, and demographic and financial success) into their own Buddhisms: see eg **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (3.1). See also **Cult Buddhism**, SD 34.5.

<sup>180</sup> Esp with the work of the Hindu philosopher and innovative reformist, Ādi Śaṅkara (788-820), the proponent of Advaita Vedanta, wherein he used Mahāyāna ideas against the Buddhists.

cially Saivite rituals, mantras, deities and ideas into their systems, the best known of which are the Avalokiteśvara cult and the six-syllabled *Om maṇī padme hūm* mantra.<sup>181</sup> Two other important external influences the Buddhists imbibed from the Hindus are those of the darshan [6.2.2] and *bhakti* [6.2.3], which we shall now turn to.

**6.2.2 Darshan.** The popular Hindu practices of *darshan* (*darśana*) and devotion (*bhakti*), too, deeply influenced later Buddhism. The Buddhists accepted, perhaps involuntarily, the Hindu notion of beholding the deity, as a result of which, it is believed that the deity, too, beholds the devotee.<sup>182</sup> **Andrew Rawlinson** (1986) claims that the essence of Mahāyāna is a single experience of direct encounter with the Buddha in which a vision, sound or voice, and cognition of the Buddha are simultaneously present.<sup>183</sup>

One of the earliest Indian sutras to be translated in China, **the Pratyutpanna Sūtra** [5.3.2], for example, first instructs the meditator to lead a life of strict moral virtue. Then he should sit down in meditation and visualize the Tathagatas (note the plural) in all their beauty and glory, sitting on the buddha-thrones and teaching (Harrison 1978: 45).

Or, the meditator could choose to visualize a single Buddha, say, Amitāyus (that is, Amitābha), sitting in meditation for one day and night, for two, three, four, five six, or seven days and nights. If he concentrates on the Tathāgata Amitāyus with undistracted thought for seven days and nights, then when seven days and nights have elapsed he shall see the Lord, the Tathāgata Amitāyus. If he does not see that Lord by day, then in a dream while sleeping the face of the Lord... will appear. (Harrison 1978:43)<sup>184</sup>

Having “met” the buddha, the meditator then should worship him and receive teachings. The meditator, visionary or dreamer, it is said, might then go on to write down his dream-experiences or the “teachings” he had thus received as a “sutra.”<sup>185</sup> This is, of course, not an authentic sutta, as it is based on a psychological experience of an unawakened person, even if such a one is a “highly attained” guru or patriarch.

A striking case has been pointed out by **Jan Nattier** (2007), who traced the origins of the “ten stages” (*daśa, bhūmi*) of the bodhisattva path to a vision by the bodhisattva Dharma,mati during his meditation. In his vision, he received this teaching, not from Shakyamuni (who has entered final nirvana), but from “the buddhas of the ten directions” (2007:123-129). This doctrine is recorded in an early version of the Avatamsaka Sūtra, which Nattier calls the Proto-Buddhāvataṃśaka Sūtra (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE).<sup>186</sup> Later, in the Daśa, bhūmika Sūtra added the perfections (*pāramitā*) to this scheme and changed the names of the stages.<sup>187</sup>

**6.2.3 Devotionalism.** Closely related to the darshan is the notion of *devotion* (*bhakti*), which is a fervent expression of faith. **Stephan Beyer** has noted that *bhakti* has the connotation of sharing and partici-

<sup>181</sup> See **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 (1.8.2).

<sup>182</sup> See Lawrence Babb 1987:396 f.

<sup>183</sup> Ancient Chinese Buddhists generally believed dreams to be real events, through which even sutras could be communicated: see **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (3.4.4.3).

<sup>184</sup> Zhiyi’s *Móhē zhǐguān* 摩訶止觀 (“The great calm and insight,” T1911.46.1a-140c) prescribes a more gruelling process: after initial purification and consecration, the devotee should repair to a specially assembled room with an Amitābha image in the centre, and was to circumambulate it for full 90 days without stopping, sitting or sleeping (*Dictionary of Buddhism* 2003: 228).

<sup>185</sup> Étienne Lamotte proposes that this is *de l’autosuggestion pure* (quoted by Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 1989: 222).

<sup>186</sup> This is actually a group of early Chinese tr comprising: 兜沙經 *Dōushā jīng* (T280) tr 支婁迦讖 *Zhī lóujiāchèn* Loka, kṣema (late 2<sup>nd</sup> cent CE), 菩薩本業經 *púsà běnyè jīng* (T281) tr 支謙 *Zhīqiān* (early-mid-3<sup>rd</sup> cent), 諸菩薩求佛本業經 *zhū púsà qiúfó běnyè jīng* (T282) tr 聶道真 *Niè dào zhēn* (a layman) & 菩薩十住行道品 *púsà shí zhù xíng dào pǐn* (T283) tr 竺法護 *Zhú fǎhù* Dharma, rakṣa. See Nattier 2003:192 n38 (on T281); 2007:109 -113; also 2005.

<sup>187</sup> 漸備一切智德經 *Jiàn bèi yīqiè zhìdé jīng* (T285) tr 竺法護 *Zhú fǎhù* Dharma, rakṣa in 297 CE, which corresponds to the *Daśa, bhūmika* ch of the 華嚴經 *Huáyán jīng* (see T2146/55.119c12: 漸備一切智慧經五卷 *jiàn bèi yīqiè zhìhuì jīng wǔ juàn*). See Nattier 2005:328 & nn.



pating, which suggests something more than the pious adoration of a distant “other” (1977:333). Like the Hindus (Babb 1981:396 f), Mahāyāna Buddhists not only wish to *see* their deities (especially their buddhas and bodhisattvas), but they also wish to be *seen* by them, or at least *believe* that they are seen by them.<sup>188</sup>

In this sense, elite Chinese Buddhism is an echo or relic of ancient Chinese imperialism, of seeing the emperor, the Son of Heaven (*deva, putra*), and to be seen by him. Ostensibly, a titled Chinese priest often exudes an imperial air about him, or is regarded by pious devotees as a holy “other” to be venerated for himself, and to do so also imbues the devotee himself with an aura of respectability and social status.<sup>189</sup> His status is even more enhanced if he is wealthy and is a generous supporter of the temple or priest, so that during public celebrations, he would be given a seat of honour near other social notables.

China, throughout its history, on account of its size and diversity, has always been an empire of sorts. It is a highly centralized society,<sup>190</sup> so that it is no surprise that traditional Chinese Buddhists, clerical or lay, greet one another in the one and same way, that is, by invoking Amitābha [6.4.2]. The figure of the emperor, the Son of Heaven, or an imperial figurehead, always looms bigger than life in some form in the Chinese psyche or collective consciousness. Since the Buddha is a “great man” (*mahā, puruṣa*) who would be world emperor if he were not a world renouncer, he is easily seen as a bigger-than-life figure with superhuman qualities. [6.2]

Unlike the early Buddhists who used the Buddhānussati (the recollection of the Buddha) merely as an inspiring meditation to gain “access concentration” (*upacāra, samādhi*), or as a launching-pad to deeper meditation [5.2.2], the Mahāyāna Buddhists generally used Buddhānussmṛti as a means of actually “meeting” the Buddha.<sup>191</sup> Could these traditional Chinese Buddhists be simply acting on their ancient reflexes towards an imperial figure they had been so used to, that is, of having an audience with the most mighty amongst them?<sup>192</sup>

**6.2.4 Samadhi of recollecting the present buddha.** Evidence of such an attempt of seeing a buddha is found in the **Pratyutpanna Sūtra** [5.3.2], which describes in great detail and depth a meditation known as “the samadhi of the direct encounter with the buddhas of the present” (*pratyutpanna, buddha sammukhāvasthita samādhi*). This is such a developed form of Buddhānussmṛti that in some sources it is called the *buddhānussmṛti samādhi*.

The buddha invoked here is not the *historical* Buddha, Shakyamuni, who is in parinirvana, and thus incommunicado, but the myriads Mahāyāna buddhas of the present, of whom the *non-historical* Amitābha is the most popular. These buddhas are, of course, simply idealized clones of Shakyamuni transposed to different world systems and parallel universes.<sup>193</sup>

Briefly, the purpose of the **pratyutpanna, buddha samādhi** is, firstly, to enable the meditator to have an audience with these buddhas and directly hear their teachings in this life itself. Secondly, having gained access to these buddha-fields, the meditator believes he can be reborn there when he dies. How access is gained is, of course, defined by the priest or teacher. Through pious repetitive recitations of their texts and repeated hagiographical narratives, such beliefs in due course become unquestioningly entrenched in the devotees’ minds.<sup>194</sup>

<sup>188</sup> See further Harrison 1992:223 f.

<sup>189</sup> This observation is mostly true of Malaysia and Singapore, or amongst the traditional Chinese or sinicized non-Chinese. We are reporting a trend here rather than a universal rule. For an insight into the difficulties of imperial Chinese Buddhism, see **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (1,2; 4.3; 5,2; 5.4).

<sup>190</sup> On the effects of a centralized state on Buddhism, see **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (7.4.2).

<sup>191</sup> On “how to meet the buddha” in Chinese Buddhism, see **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (3.4.4).

<sup>192</sup> On *bhakti* in Buddhism, see Beyer 1977:333-336.

<sup>193</sup> In an important way, we can still see this creation and apotheosis of new religious figures, such as in Jedi religion, inspired by the Star Wars movie series. Indeed, in due course as our current 2D or even 3D movies evolved into 4D technology and so on, the religiousity and mystique of such figures (as the Jedi knights) would become even more exotic and appealing. See eg <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jediism>.

<sup>194</sup> See Harrison 2003:123.

By way of preparation, the meditator must have some understanding of the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñā, pāramitā*) teachings, centering around existential emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and a mixture of traditional method of *buddhānumṛti*, based of the Mahāyāna cosmology.<sup>195</sup> Having chosen a particular buddha of the present, the meditator seats himself in a quiet place, faces the direction in which that buddha resides, and visualizes him teaching the Dharma, surrounded by his disciples in his universe. If one sustains the practice for seven days and seven nights, then one is guaranteed a vision of that buddha, either in a waking state or in a dream (PratBSS 3B).

This visualization practice, as such, adds a *physical* buddha form to the original *buddhānumṛti*, which is the recollection of the nine worthy virtues, or ten such qualities in the Mahāyāna.<sup>196</sup> Here, the buddha is visualized as embodying the 32 marks of the great man, a set found in both the Pali and the Sanskrit traditions.<sup>197</sup> To help this detailed visualization, the meditator is advised to visualize the buddha's body as resembling an image. The text, in places, in fact, mentions the use of images, in either two- or three-dimensions, that is, an image either as a picture or as a statue (eg PratBSS 4D).

Lastly, the buddha is visualized as teaching in the midst of an assembly of disciples, that is, in the centre of a complex mandala [6.1.4]. However real such a picture might appear, the meditator is reminded not to perceive it in an inappropriate way, that is, not to “objectify” or “perceive” it (Tib *dmigs pa*; Skt *upa + √LABH*, to receive),<sup>198</sup> but to see it as empty or devoid of independent existence. Hence, it is clear that the buddha in the meditation, at least in the Sūtra, as Harrison notes, “is seen not as an end in itself, but as a means to a correct understanding of the true nature of phenomenal reality.” (1992:222).

**6.3 MEETING PRESENT BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS.** In fact, even when we read **the Large Sukhāvati, vyūha Sūtra** [biblio] and similar texts, we have descriptions not of something already existing (despite the mythical language), but, as **Harrison** notes, “as blueprints for something which is to be constructed in the mind, and then engaged with, just like the buddha visualized in the *pratyutpanna-samādhi*” (2003:122)<sup>199</sup> [6.1.2]. The point is that this constructive, or symbolic, nature of the visualization is often forgotten, so that the practitioners actually *believe* that they are meeting that buddha *in person*. Or that, from such a visualization, they could realize the full and true nature of emptiness, that they are *enlightened*. “All is this is a far cry from the supposedly preliminary purification practice of the early Pāli sources” (Harrison 1992:224).

In this way, the ritual of visualizing the present buddhas was in due course extended to other figures, especially the so-called celestial bodhisattvas, such as Avalokiteśvara. Although this development is motivated by a number of factors, the *apotropaic* (warding off bad luck or evil) is the key factor. The famous chapter 25 of **the Saddharma, puṇḍarīka Sūtra**, for example, promises that a recollection of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is said to bring about a very long list of protections, healings, etc.<sup>200</sup>

In such recollections, the practitioner is instructed to “bear the name in mind” (Skt *nāma, dheya*, √DHR to uphold), for example, to mentally recite the Bodhisattva's name, or recollect his virtues, but the precise sense of this term is uncertain.<sup>201</sup> However, such an apotropaic ritual tends to attract devotees who are

<sup>195</sup> Detailed directions are given in chs 3, 4, and 8 of the Sūtra (ch & para division accord to the Tib text).

<sup>196</sup> On the 10 virtues of the Buddha, see *Buddhānussati*, SD 15.7 (1.4).

<sup>197</sup> See **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30/3:142-179), SD 36.9.

<sup>198</sup> See John Bowker. “*Dmigs pa*.” *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. 1997.

<sup>199</sup> However, PratBSS does explicitly say that the practitioner can journey to Sukhāvātī (or any of the other buddha-field) in this very life, before they die.

<sup>200</sup> Such a recollection can save one from dangers to life and limb, dangers from fire, flood, shipwreck, attacks by wild beasts, execution, imprisonment, lightning strikes, the negative effects of the supernatural, banditry, snakebite, and so on. In fact, such a listing of benefits came to be listed in such magical texts because so “alarmingly comprehensive” (Harrison's phrase) that in Saṅghāta Sūtra, eg, even the karmic effects any of the 5 “heinous evils” (killing of parents, killing an arhat, hurting a Buddha, bringing about a schism) could be wiped clean if one hears even just 4 verses, “how much more so, of those who fully write, read, recite, and make offerings to it, such merits and virtues are immeasurable.” (ch 2). See **Cult Buddhism**, SD 34.5 (1.2.3.2).

<sup>201</sup> See Harrison 1992:225 & 234 n45.

steeped in unquestioning faith than in investigative wisdom, so that forgetting their proper practice and purpose, they are no different from prayers to the Hindu gods or to the Christian cult of saints.

A careful study of such texts would show that they do *not*, as a rule, say that Avalokiteśvara or a particular deity himself, in person, saves the faithful from their particular peril.<sup>202</sup> They also do not explain how such invocations affect the animate or inanimate sources of the dangers. Aside from saying that they alleviate fear, or protect the believer against its bad luck, in the same way as the Pali Buddhānussati does, it is difficult to explain or substantiate the psychological or karmic nature of such processes.<sup>203</sup>

The situation is further culturally and linguistically complicated by the Chinese language, where the printed word is often itself regarded as being sacred.<sup>204</sup> *the word is the thing*.<sup>205</sup> In other words, the power of the blessing or cure does not result from our mental efforts, but from the external powers of an inanimate object.<sup>206</sup> This *literary animism* pervades traditional Mahāyāna Chinese, so that seeing *is* believing. On a social level, this becomes a political correctness of the *face*,<sup>207</sup> of correct social behaviour or being seen to *act* correctly and to *speak* correctly, of accepted ritual behaviour, that is, a form of religious behaviourism.

Another special difficulty here is a key term related to *buddhānussmṛti*, that is the word 念 *niàn*,<sup>208</sup> which can mean either “meditate, recollect” or “chant, recite, or read out loud.” The former is clearly the original meaning in relation to *buddhānussmṛti*, but it is the latter—the ritualistic and apotropaic sense—that is now generally accepted as characterizing it.<sup>209</sup> This is how we today generally understand 念佛 *niànfó* in Chinese or 念仏 *nembutsu* in Japanese.<sup>210</sup> When a Chinese says *niànfó* today, it almost always means to “chant the buddha’s name.”

Religious technology has even advanced to such a level that we now have handy little Amitābha “chanting boxes,” running on batteries, where at the press of a button, we can hear the sacred chant, with two chanting styles to choose from. It would be interesting to see next generation of Pure Land technology as society progresses.

## 6.4 SUKHĀVĀTĪ AND OTHER PARADISES

### 6.4.1 The Sukhāvati,vyūha Sūtras

6.4.1.1 THE TEXT. Mandalas [6.1.4] of celestial buddhas seated in the centre of their assemblies teaching the Dharma are described in texts such as **the Large Sukhāvātī,vyūha** (the Western Paradise) [2.5] and **the Akṣobhya,vyūha** (the Eastern Paradise).<sup>211</sup> Most modern readers, unfamiliar with the oral tradition or with meditative texts, might find such texts difficult and tedious on account of their interminably repetitive descriptions of the landscape and environment, and the characteristics and conduct of their inhabitants.

As we have already mentioned, these texts are not meant to be read, but to be *performed* [6.1.1]. Such texts are used for projecting a mental vision for meditation, or as **Harrison** says, they are not describ-

<sup>202</sup> Accounts of human encounters with Guanyin are, as a rule, the tradition of folklore, not the sutras: see eg Yu Chun-fang, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese transformation of Avalokiteśvara*, NY: Columbia Univ Press, 2000.

<sup>203</sup> See Harrison 1992:225.

<sup>204</sup> See **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (2.7.2). On the nature and difficulties of the Chinese language, see **Language and discourse**, SD 26.11 (3.2.5).

<sup>205</sup> Gregory Bateson (quoting Alfred Korzybski) famously declares, as if echoing early Buddhist teachings, “The name is not the thing named” (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chicago, 1972). On the problem of language, see **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 (5.1) & **Saññā**, SD 17.4 (2-6).

<sup>206</sup> See **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (2.7; 23.82).

<sup>207</sup> On the psychology of “face,” see **Piṇḍolya S** (S 22.80/3:91-94), SD 28.9a (3.4).

<sup>208</sup> 念 *niàn* is composed of the radical 心 *xīn* “the heart/mind” and the component 今 “today, present, now. Etymologically, therefore, it means “minding the present.”

<sup>209</sup> See Harrison 1992:227.

<sup>210</sup> On “meeting the buddha,” see further **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (3.4.4).

<sup>211</sup> Chin 阿閼佛國經 *āchùfó guó jīng* (T313.11.751-764). On 阿閼婆 *āchùpó*, see [Digital Dictionary of Buddhism](http://www.dhammadownload.com/) (password: “guest”).

ing a world, but “constituting it, that is, as prescription” (2003:121). As an example of what is undoubtedly, for the modern reader, the most tedious part of the Sukhāvati,vyūha, let us look at **chapter 16**, where the Buddha, in clear echoes of the Mahā Sudassana Sutta [§1.32], describes the fabulous trees to Ānanda:

(A) And there are, Ānanda, jewelled<sup>212</sup> trees (*ratna, vrkṣa*), multicoloured, varied colours, numerous hundred of thousands of colours.<sup>213</sup>

There are jewelled trees of gold colour,	made of gold	( <i>suvarṇa</i> ).
There are those of silver colour,	made of silver	( <i>rūpya</i> ).
There are those of beryl colour,	made of beryl	( <i>vaiḍūrya</i> ).
There are those of crystal colour,	made of crystal	( <i>sphaṭika</i> ).
There are those of sapphire colour,	made of sapphire	( <i>musāra, galva</i> ).
There are those of ruby colour,	made of ruby	( <i>lohita, muktā</i> ). <sup>214</sup>
There are those of emerald colour,	made of emerald	( <i>aśma, garbha</i> ). <sup>215</sup>
(B) There are some of two jewels,	silver and gold.	
There are some of three jewels,	silver, gold and beryl.	
There are some of four jewels,	silver, gold, beryl, and crystal.	
There are some of five jewels,	silver, gold, beryl, crystal and sapphire.	
There are some of six jewels,	silver, gold, beryl, crystal, sapphire and ruby.	
There are some of seven jewels,	silver, gold, beryl, crystal, sapphire, ruby and emerald as the seventh.	

(C) There, Ānanda, the trees made of gold have roots, trunks, shoots, branches, flowers, and leaves made of gold, but fruits made of silver.

The trees made of silver have only flowers, leaves, branches, limbs, trunks, and roots, made of silver, but fruits made of beryl.

The trees made of crystal have only flowers, leaves, branches, limbs, trunks, and roots, made of crystal, but fruits made of sapphire.

The trees made of sapphire have only flowers, leaves, branches, limbs, trunks, and roots, made of sapphire, but fruits made of ruby.

The trees made of ruby have only flowers, leaves, branches, limbs, trunks, and roots, made of ruby, but fruits made of emerald.

The trees made of emerald have only flowers, leaves, branches, limbs, trunks, and roots, made of emerald, but fruits made of gold. (Sukhāvātī,vyūha ch 16) [6.1.1]<sup>216</sup>

6.4.1.2 THE VISUALIZATION. Harrison has pointed out that while such passages are tediously long in the later versions like the Sanskrit and the Tibetan, they are even more detailed in the early Chinese translations, where they follow a more systematic pattern (2003:121). The Chinese version is prepared in such a way that it can be *recited*. A neophyte usually needs to refer to the text for his chanting, but in due course, after he has memorized the whole text, he is able to recite it from memory. Then, with proper guidance, he is ready for the *visualization* practice.

Before the visualization itself, the practitioner performs all the proper preliminaries, such as puja, offerings, bowing, recitations, and so on. The practitioner then sits comfortably in meditation posture and closely follows the instructions as laid out in the text. Such a practice understandably has to be done by oneself. Most of the visualization are quite straight forward, but some are given in compacted form, such

<sup>212</sup> The words “jewelled,” “jewel” and so on refer to any of the precious substances mentioned here, very much like the word “jewelry.”

<sup>213</sup> These are the 7 jewels, with nos 5+6 switched around: as at §1.4. On the relation of these colours to kasina, see [4.2.2.3].

<sup>214</sup> *Lohita, mukta*, lit, “red pearl,” but pearls are only of these colours, viz, white, pink, silver, cream, golden, green, blue, black, yellow, or rainbow. The Pali here has *lohita āṅka* (“ruby”), which is prob synonymous.

<sup>215</sup> Emerald is not found in the Pali septad [eg §§1.4, 1.5, 1.6], where the 7<sup>th</sup> is “all-jewel” (*sabba, ratana*).

<sup>216</sup> My own tr. See also Gómez 1996:84 f.



as section (B) above, which needs to be visualized in full, with all their roots, trunks, shoots, branches, flowers, and leaves made of gold, and fruits made of various jewels.

6.4.1.3 THE JEWELS. The seven jewels listed by **the Sukhāvati,vyūha** are the same as those of the Mahā Sudassana Sutta, which has *gold, silver, beryl, crystal, ruby, sapphire, and all the jewels*, that is, omitting the emerald. This is no mere coincidence, but clearly shows a historical connection, that the Sanskrit text must be linked to the Pali version, or perhaps to a common more ancient text. The seven-jewel passages in the Mahā Sudassana Sutta describe:

- §1.5.2 Kusā,vātī’s gate pillars: One pillar is made of gold; one of silver; one of beryl; one of crystal, one of ruby, one of sapphire; one of all the jewels.
- §1.6.1-2 The 7 rows of palms encircling Kusā,vātī One row of palm trees is made of gold; one of silver; one of beryl; one of crystal, one of ruby, one of sapphire; one of all the jewels.
- §1.32.1-2 The 7 rows of palms around the lotus lake. The gold palm has a golden trunk, with silver leaves and fruits. The silver palm has a silver trunk, with golden leaves and fruits. The beryl palm has a beryl trunk, with crystal leaves and fruits. The crystal palm has a crystal trunk, with beryl leaves and fruits. The ruby palm has a ruby trunk, with sapphire leaves and fruits. The sapphire palm has a ruby trunk, with ruby leaves and fruits. The all-jewelled palm has an all-jewelled trunk, all-jewelled leaves and fruits.

The descriptions of *the musical jewelled trees* by the Sukhāvātī,vyūha are also remarkably close to those of the Mahā Sudassana Sutta. Another important similarity is that the Sukhāvātī,vyūha opens with Ānanda remarking to the Buddha that he has an especially *radiant complexion* (ch 2) [§2.10.1]. This clearly hints at its connection with the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta, too.<sup>217</sup>

6.4.1.4 NO MEDITATION. However, there is an important difference. **The Sukhāvati,vyūha** downplays the significance of the four kasina colours—gold serving as yellow kasina, silver as white kasina, ruby as red kasina, and sapphire as blue kasina [4.2.2.3]—but omits any mention of the four dhyanas, laid out in an important passage in the Mahā Sudassana Sutta [§2.3]. This further serves as evidence that while the Mahā Sudassana Sutta centres around *meditation* (in the early Buddhist sense), the Sukhāvati,vyūha has its focus on something else, that is, *visualization*, gazing on new buddhas and new universes newly created.

One might say, in psychological terms, that these insightful, some might say desperate, visionaries were looking for a new father-image, since the old one had died [6.4.3]. As long as there is a human need and worldliness, we will invent and reinvent religion, we will reinvent the wheel as often as we must. If we have not put out the inner fire, we will keep feeding it with external fuel. If we have not realized the wheel of truth for ourselves, then we are likely to construct the wheels of myth and hope. So we go back to worshipping wind, fire, water, earth, stone, metal, plastic and wheels, until in due course we realize their true nature and purposes.<sup>218</sup> The rule of thumb is that all religions and faiths are always provisional.

**6.4.2 The popularity of “Western” Paradise.** The desire to meet the buddha is still common today, especially amongst the followers of the “Pure Land” or Amitābha tradition. If one is unable to see the buddha in this life in meditation, then one could *after death* be reborn in his presence in the Pure Land, Sukhāvātī, where he dwells. The earliest Pure Lands are modelled on the heavens of Buddhist tradition.

<sup>217</sup> See **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,4.37/2:133 f), SD 9.

<sup>218</sup> For a deeper study, see **(Dve) Khandhā S** (S 22.48/3:47 f), SD 17.1a & SD 17.

Pure Land devotees believe, through recollecting the buddha or even by merely reciting his name, they would be reborn in his Pure Land.<sup>219</sup>

Pure Land (*jìngtǔ* 淨土) Buddhism, due to its simplicity and promise, and also because it arose as a response to the religious needs of the populous grassroots East Asian Buddhists (especially Chinese and Japanese), became the most widespread of Buddhisms. It also should be understood that, unlike other schools of Chinese Buddhism, the Pure Land tradition is more of a *trend* (than a separate school) that pervades all of Chinese Buddhism. Every traditional Chinese Buddhist, clerical or lay, would greet one another by invoking Amitābha, uttering, 阿彌陀佛 *ēmituó fó*, or more fully, 南無阿彌陀佛 *nā mó ēmituó fó* or *nánmó ēmituó fó* (Skt *namaḥ Amitābhāya*). [6.2.3]

Western Paradise is the most popular of the celestial paradises amongst the east Asian Buddhists, especially the Chinese, probably for *geographical* reasons. The west, the direction of the setting sun, is the quarter of death, and Buddhism, amongst traditional East Asia, is popularly associated with death and its rituals, even to this day. The figures of Amitābha, who is also closely associated with his mythical “son,” Avalokiteśvara or 觀音 Guānyīn,<sup>220</sup> are comforting figures in times of loss and need.

The “west” is also regarded in ancient China as *the* sacred direction, that of the holy land, ancient India, 天竺 *tiānzhu*.<sup>221</sup> To “go west” is to go on a pilgrimage to the holy land, India. We famously see this phrase in the title of the popular Tang allegorical romance 西遊記 *xīyóujì*, “the journey west.”<sup>222</sup>

At the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese monks began to travel all the way to India to obtain Buddhist texts. The best known of these pilgrims were **Faxian** 法顯 (401-414), **Xuanzang** 玄奘 (629-645) and **Yijing** 義淨 (671-695), all of whom made valuable records of their travels. Xuanzang’s journals are known as *Record of the Western Regions* 大唐西域記 *dàtáng xīyù jì*.<sup>223</sup>

**6.4.3 Audiovisual theism.** Although rooted in early Buddhist teachings, the visualization and buddhas described in the Sukhāvati, vyūha and related texts are, in terms of early Buddhism, new and unfamiliar, located in entirely alien universes. Why did these inventive visionaries construct a new religious world of cosmic buddhas and majestic bodhisattvas? One might say, in psychological terms, that these visionaries were looking for a new father-figure and new heaven, since the old one had died or is too distant culturally and spiritually [6.4.1.4].

Without the original teacher, without the first patriarch, nirvana seems too distant and difficult to be reached. So they turn to new spiritual fathers or ancestors in such “present” buddhas as Amitābha.<sup>224</sup> His buddha-field or paradise, Sukhāvati, and other such paradises, serve as half-way houses to the singular nirvana. Or, perhaps some see Sukhāvati and such paradises as embodiment of nirvana, the summum bonum made visible, and in visualizing this reflection of the highest good, perhaps they could eventually attain it.

We have noted how an “emperor archetype,”<sup>225</sup> the figure of superhuman power and grace, tends to be deeply embedded in the Chinese psyche [6.2.3]. We could stretch this archetype psychology further by saying that a Chinese temple or monastery is really a miniature imperial palace (sometimes not so miniature), or acts as a counterpoint to the imperial palace, or its religious counterpart. If the emperor’s palace, the centre of worldly power is located on a geomantically ideal level spread of safe rich *plains*, the monastic hub of religious power and wealth is nested in *the mountains*, the abodes of auspicious dragons.

<sup>219</sup> See Paul Williams 2000:110 f, 175, 181-185.

<sup>220</sup> See [Digital Dictionary of Buddhism](#) (password: “guest”).

<sup>221</sup> Here, the component characters, 天 means “heaven,” and 竺 *zhú* is the homophone for the final syllable of *Sindhu*, the ancient name of the Indus river, and by which the ancient Chinese knew India.

<sup>222</sup> Simplified as 西游记, written by Wú Chéng’ēn 吳承恩 (ca 1505-1580 or 1500-1582). See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journey\\_to\\_the\\_West](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journey_to_the_West).

<sup>223</sup> See Piya Tan, “History of Buddhism,” 2004 lecture 3 (14).

<sup>224</sup> On how such an idea becomes politicized, see Neumaier 2007.

<sup>225</sup> An **archetype**, as used here, is a constantly recurring symbol or motif in literature, painting, or mythology. This is a usage drawn from both comparative anthropology and Jungian archetypal theory.

Understandably, the traditional Chinese tend to view their temple priests in their majestic robes as authority figures, to be respected or obeyed, even feared, without question. For, they are the living echoes of a glorious imperial past. It is not uncommon for such faithfuls to attribute superhuman or divine qualities to such figures of the cloth: they are indeed the nearest we have to royalty, even gods, walking the earth. Or, so are they regarded.

Just as the Hindus adore and worship their gods and gurus, so too do the traditional Mahāyāna Chinese venerate their “masters” (師傅 *shīfu*), often with various grand titles. In such a system, *the uniform defines the person*, the robe attributes power onto the robed.<sup>226</sup> If we think that a priest is “holy” and worthy of our adoration simply because he is robed, then we are being *fetishist* (treating people as objects, even if sacred). But this is what often happens: it is more done than said.<sup>227</sup>

With just a small stretch of imagination, this power is easily, and deservedly, attributed to the buddhas themselves. The Buddha has been *apotheosized* into myriads of divine forms. To invoke these celestial buddhas and deities, we need only be visualize them or speak their names. They could be spiritually, even personally, approached by the proper ritual of inner sight or outer sound. These are verily the basis of an *audiovisual theism*. The Buddha’s body might have perished, but to the Mahāyāna, he is still present in myriad forms. We only need to know how to get in touch with him.<sup>228</sup>

**6.4.4 Samādhi is everything (Mahāyāna).** A important characteristic of later Mahāyāna, especially seen in its classical writings, such as Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa, the Aśoka, dattā Sūtra and the Saddharma, puṇḍarīka Sūtra, are not only triumphalist in tone, denigrating early Buddhism as the “inferior vehicle” (*hīna, yāna*), but they also take the liberty of redefining *samādhi* in a “great vehicle” sense. While in the early texts, *samādhi* specifically refers to meditative concentration, often leading to or connected with *dhyana*,<sup>229</sup> in these Mahāyāna classics, it does not always refer to any real state of meditative concentration. Often, as **Florin Deleanu** has noted, the word *samādhi* is used in a *stylistic* sense, “stressing the fact that the apprehension of the most profound aspects of reality must be connected with a state of concentration.”<sup>230</sup>

Deleanu quotes the example of **the Samādhi, rāja Sūtra**, which “lists hundreds of qualifications and merits of ‘the *samādhi* that is manifested as the sameness of the essential nature of all *dharmas*’ (*sarva, dharmā, svabhāva, samatā, vipaṅcīta, samādhi*),<sup>231</sup> but there is no clearly identifiable meditative technique, which can be singled out as this particular *samādhi*.” (1999:73). Here, *samādhi* apparently refers not only to a “cognitive experience of emptiness” but is used in its broadest signification, including the bodhisattva’s practices and the sutra itself (Gomez et al 1989:16).

Deleanu further notes that “in spite of the huge number of theoretical and rhetorical considerations on the *samādhi* which gives its title, the *Śuraṅgama, samādhi-sūtra* contains only one brief passage on how the ‘*samādhi* of the heroic march’ should be practised:<sup>232</sup> the *Bodhisattva* should ‘contemplate all phenomena as empty 空 *kōng*, with no resistance 無所障礙 *wú suǒ zhàng’ài* (*apratigha*), perishing with each

<sup>226</sup> On the patriarch’s purple robe (*zǐyī* 紫衣), see **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (5.2.2.2). Power externalized or “routinized” into objects or ritualized could thus be transferred from person to person, so that such persons form a lineage, that could be contrived to go back to the Buddha himself. Enlightenment, too, is no more a matter of self-effort, or is insufficient so, but needs the conferment or endorsement of the master. See **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (5) esp (5.1.2.9) (Chan lineages).

<sup>227</sup> See further **The Three Roots Inc**, SD 31.12 (3.4.3).

<sup>228</sup> On “visual theism” in Mahāyāna, see Beyer 1977:337 f.

<sup>229</sup> See **Samādhi**, SD 33.1a.

<sup>230</sup> Deleanu 1999:73, where he quotes Conze: who aptly remarks, “In the beginnings of the Mahāyāna it became usual to give names to a manifold variety of concentrated attentions on insights into aspects of truth, and even to the concomitants of being in a state of concentration.” (Conze, tr, *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom*, Berkeley, 1975: 21) (2000:98 n48).

<sup>231</sup> Deleanu has adopted the tr given by Gomez et al in Gomez & Silk 1989:15 f. For a discussion on the philological problem raised by this term, see Gomez & Silk 1989:79 f n7.

<sup>232</sup> T15.463b21-c5; P32.331b2-332a4. The prefix P = Peking [Beijing] ed of Tibetan Tripiṭaka, Otani repr, Tokyo, 1956.

thought 念念滅盡 *niàn niàn miè jìn*, without aversion or passion 離於憎愛 *líyú zēng'ài*.” (1999:73, fn omitted; Chinese added).

The Sutra goes on to say that the practice of this *samādhi* is not singular, and its actual cultivation depends on the manifestation (“turning”) of mind and its mental factors (心心所行 *xīn xīn suǒ xíng*, *citta,-caitta,pravṛtti*) of each being. It also makes an interesting remark that this *samādhi* contains all *dhyāna*, *samāpatti*, *vimokṣa*, *samādhi*, *abhiññā* and *ṛddhi*.<sup>233</sup> Again, this definition, despite its unreserved comprehensiveness, says nothing about *samādhi* as a meditative means or state.

**6.4.5 The tyranny of words.** Mahāyāna, the great vehicle, is true to *the word*: it is great with words. From what is characteristic of much of Mahāyāna literature, as demonstrated above, is that it has a tendency to *catholicize* words, to define things into universal existence or being. If we take the word “catholic” to mean “universal” (OED), or “to be free from provincial (ie inferior) prejudice or predisposition,” then to *catholicize* is to make an idea or thing universally right and acceptable, that is, to *mahayanize*.

Mahāyāna writings are some of the most beautiful of Buddhist literature, as far as writing goes. This is of course the level of *the word*. We use words to discuss other words, to prove or disprove them, and work with ideas or against them. **The Prajñā,pāramitā literature** gives us some of the best examples of such Mahāyāna attempts at the mastery of wordsmithing.

In an important sense, the Mahāyāna writers have been successful, if their purpose is to inspire us to use words to see beyond them, like using a telescope to see some distant object, or a microscope to examine a tiny object, or using some sophisticated scientific instrument. Before we can really benefit from this transcendence, we need to understand what these Mahāyāna writers *mean* by their words, or better, what they are *doing* with their words, what their real intentions are and how these affect their audience. This is not always easy to know, but we (thanks mostly to the dedicated professional and professed scholars) are beginning to see more of the Mahāyāna trees despite its forests.

Even knowing everything there is to know on the *word* level—historically, philologically, or in any other scholarly way—only clarifies the letter but not always the spirit. We could of course work trajectories surmising or speculating the minds of these Mahāyāna writers. The fact remains that we can only be *provisionally* right, pending future researches and funds, and depending on whose views we choose to respect, and indeed, what our own purposes of doing all this are really about.

My point is that Buddhism cannot be fully understood on the word level alone, no matter how well the scholars prosper on this. Indeed, the unknowns and uncertainties of Buddhism legitimizes the lives of various academic disciplines that study Buddhism and Buddhists: it creates jobs for the scholars, and royally supports them. The general benefits of this enterprise are of course immeasurable. For, the light these dedicated scholars cast on Buddhism as a historical, social, psychological and religious phenomenon inspires the faithful and insightful to rethink their positions and directions, and in that way at least, enrich their religious lives.

Beyond that, we need the light of faith and feeling, without which, we are nothing more than followers and worshippers of academics, secular or monastic. We have not tasted the Dharma for what it really is. We worship the word, but miss the spirit.<sup>234</sup> “Such a person,” says the Buddha, “is an outsider, one who stands on the worldling’s side.”<sup>235</sup>

For what the academics and gurus *professionally* bind together, we need to *intuitively* unbind before we can really taste the truth for ourselves. We need to construct our own raft of the Dharma, paddle with all our four limbs or perhaps with some kind of oar, to steer across the floods of wealth, words and views to the safe far shore of inner peace. The purpose of Buddhism is to free our minds from the clutter of

<sup>233</sup> T15.631c27-632a1; P32.289a3-a5. For other refs, see Deleanu 1999:98 n51.

<sup>234</sup> These phrase are found in the pericope on the Dharma’s appearance in the world: see eg **Veḷu,dvāreyya S** (S 55.7.2/5:352), SD 1.5.

<sup>235</sup> *Bahiro puthujjana,pakkhe ṭhito: (Sotāpanna) Nandiya S* (S 55.40/5:397 f), SD 47.1. In **Paṭipanna S** (S 48.18-/5:202), the same is said of one who lacks the 5 faculties (*pañc’indriya*): faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.



things, words and thoughts. For, these are what that tightly hold our mind-door, closing it to spiritual liberation.

Only when we are truly free from words, thoughts, views, even feelings, that we can really attain some level of the heart's liberation, and even to go on to attain dhyana. Even if we have managed to merely stand at the dhyana's door, not yet able to enter it, we can still emerge from that experience with a heart so still and clear that we now better understand why we are at a loss for words, and why we keep generating words and more words, generation after generation, life after life. What is it all really about?

**6.5 RETURN TO BUDDHA DHARMA.** Although early Buddhism is monastic, there is an important place for the laity, too. In the parable of the three fields, given in **the (Khetta) Desanā Sutta** (S 42.7), the Buddha explains that he would first and foremost teach *the monastics* (the most fertile field), since they have renounced the world to dedicate their lives to learning the Dharma for liberation here and now. Then he would teach *the laity* (the middling field) because they have taken the Buddha as their teacher and the Dharma as their refuge (that is, life-guide). Finally, he might or might not teach *the others* (that is, those not committed to the Buddhist life), depending on the occasion.<sup>236</sup>

Another important related teaching concerns the spiritual attainments of the members of the fourfold assemblies.<sup>237</sup> **The Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) records the Buddha as telling Māra, just after the great awakening and just before his parinirvana, that he (the Buddha) would only pass away when the fourfold assemblies of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen have been well established, that is, they have attained various levels of sainthood or liberation. The fourfold assemblies are described as comprising individuals who

are accomplished, trained, skilled, learned, bearers of the Dharma, trained in accordance with the Dharma, correctly trained and walking the path of the Dharma, who will pass on what they have gained from their own Teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyse it, make it clear; until they shall be able by means of the Dharma to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dharma in all its wonder. (D 16,3.7-8/2:104-106) @ SD 9

These statements are highly significant as they show that, in early Buddhism, monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, are all capable of attaining spiritual distinction (*visesa*),<sup>238</sup> that is, the various levels of sainthood.<sup>239</sup> Many others who are not saints, are “good worldlings” (*kalyāṇa puthujjana*)<sup>240</sup> or “true individuals” (*sappurisa*)<sup>241</sup> who make great effort in living morally virtuous lives, keeping mindfulness, and practising meditation.<sup>242</sup> The early Buddhists were truly happy individuals, uncluttered by materialism, philosophizing or ritualism, that tend to become increasingly common in later Buddhisms.<sup>243</sup>

In **the (Sotāpanna) Nandiya Sutta** (S 55.40), Nandiya the Sakya asks the Buddha about stream-winning, thus:

“Bhante, when the 4 limbs for streamwinning<sup>244</sup> are completely and totally non-existent in a noble disciple, would that noble disciple be one who dwells diligently?”

<sup>236</sup> See **(Khetta) Desana S** (S 42.7/4:315-317), SD 51.5; **Why the Buddha hesitated**, SD 12.1 (3.2) (abr).

<sup>237</sup> The proper term here is *parisā* (lit, “sitting around”), not *saṅgha*, which is properly reserved for the monastic (celibate and unmoneyed) renunciants as a community: see **Bad friendship**, SD 64.17 (7.4.3.2).

<sup>238</sup> See **Sambādh’okāsa S** (A 6.26) @ SD 15.6 (2.3.2).

<sup>239</sup> For the 4 types of saints, see eg **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 112.9-12/3:80) & **Mahāli S** (D 6.13/1:156).

<sup>240</sup> A good worldling is an unawakened person who is practising the way (keeping to the precepts, meditating and building wisdom, ie the 3 trainings). See **Nakula,pitā S** (S 33.1) @ SD 5.4 (3.2). On the 3 trainings, see **Sīla samā-dhī paññā**, SD 21.6.

<sup>241</sup> For a detailed study, see **Sappurisa S** (M 113/3:37-45), SD 23.7. Opp is “false individuals” (*kāpurisa*) who is unable keep a calm mind: see **(Pañca,nāṇa) Samādhī S** (A 5.27/3:24), SD 33.13(3.3).

<sup>242</sup> For the laity doing meditation, see **Saṅkha,dhama S** (S 42.8/4:317-322), SD 57.9; **(Anātha,piṇḍika) Pīti S** (A 5.176/3:206-208), SD 44.10. See also **Laymen saints**, SD 8.6 (10.2).

<sup>243</sup> On prophecies of Dharma decline, see **The Dharma-ending age**, SD 1.10 esp (3).

<sup>244</sup> *Sotāpatti-y-aṅgāni*. Here these “factors for streamwinning” refers to the state before one is a streamwinner [2a]. What is then listed in the Sutta itself are the 4 “factors of streaming” (*sotāpannassa aṅgāni*), ie wise faith in the

The Buddha answers that such a person is “an outsider, one who stands on the worldling’s side,”<sup>245</sup> and goes on to explain the difference between a noble disciple who is negligent and the one who is diligent. (Note here that the reference is to “a noble disciple who is negligent,” not to a worldling.)

“And how, Nandiya, is a noble disciple one who dwells negligently?

Here, Nandiya, a noble disciple has wise faith in the Buddha,... Content with that wise faith, he makes *no* further effort in solitude by day *nor* in seclusion by night.<sup>246</sup> When he thus dwells negligently, there is no gladness (*pāmuja*).<sup>247</sup>

When there is no gladness, there is no zest (*pīti*).

When there is no zest, there is no tranquillity (*passaddhi*).

When there is no tranquillity, he dwells in suffering.

The mind of one who suffers does not become concentrated. When the mind is not concentrated, realities do not occur (*dhammā na pātubhavanti*).<sup>248</sup>

Because there is no manifestation of phenomena, he is regarded as ‘one who dwells negligently.’

Furthermore, Nandiya, a noble disciple has wise faith in the Dharma...

Furthermore, Nandiya, a noble disciple has wise faith in the Sangha...

Furthermore, Nandiya, a noble disciple has virtues dear to the noble ones,<sup>249</sup> unbroken, untorn, unmixed, spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, giving rise to concentration.<sup>250</sup>

Content with those virtues..., he makes no further effort for solitude by day nor for seclusion by night.

When he thus dwells negligently, there is no gladness.

When there is no gladness, there is no zest.

When there is no zest, there is no tranquillity.

When there is no tranquillity, he dwells in suffering.

The mind of one who suffers does not become concentrated.

When the mind is not concentrated, there is no occurrence of phenomena.

Because of the non-occurrence of realities,<sup>251</sup> he is regarded as “one who dwells negligently (*pamāda, vihārī*).” (S 55.40.5/5:398) @ SD 47.1

three jewels and immaculate moral virtue [2b]. There is a possibility that *sotāpatti-y-aṅgāni* and *sotāpannessa aṅgāni* are synonymous, at least as used here.

<sup>245</sup> *Bahiro puthujjana, pakkhe ṭhito*. In **Paṭipanna S** (S 48.18/5:202), the same is said of one who lacks the 5 faculties (*pañc’indriya*): faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

<sup>246</sup> *So tena Buddhhe avecca-p, pasādena santuṭṭho na uttarim vāyamati divā pavivekāya rattim paṭisallānāya*. In other word, he does not spend time in solitary reflection and meditation.

<sup>247</sup> From here on, and also the section on living diligently, as in **Pamāda, vihārī S** (S 35.97/4:78 f).

<sup>248</sup> Comy here (SA 3:289) and to **Pamāda, vihārī S** (SA 2:385 ad S 35.97/4:78 f) explain this sentence as meaning that the states of calm and insight (*samatha, vipassanā dhammā*) do not appear. Bodhi, however, “think[s] the point is that the internal and external sense bases (the *dhammā*) do not appear as impermanent, suffering, and non-self” (S:B 1411). This interpretation is supported by the stock passage, “Such is form... feeling... perception... formations... consciousness; such is its passing away”: see the 2 **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22.14/2:301 f; M 10.38/1:61), (**Khandha Samādhi S** (S 22.5/3:13f), (**Saḷāyatana Samādhi S** (S 35.99/4:80) & also **Dasa, bala S 1** (S 12.21/2:27 f), **Dasa, bala S 2** (S 12.23/2:29-32), **Sīha S** (S 22.78/3:84-86), **Khemaka S** (S 22.89/3:126-132) and **Nāva S** (S 22.101/3:-152-155). The origin and passing away of the aggregates are explained in **Paṭisallāna S** (S 22.6/3:15) by way of diachronic conditionality, and in **Upādāna Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56/3:58-61 @ SD 3.7) & **Satta-ṭṭhāna S** (S 22.57/3:61-65) by way of synchronic conditionality. See S:B 743 n58.

<sup>249</sup> “Virtues dear to the noble ones,” *ariya, kantāni sīlāni*. See (2b) above.

<sup>250</sup> “Unbroken, ... giving rise to concentration,” *akhaṇḍehi acchiddehi asabalehi akammāsehi bhujissehi viññūpa-satthehi aparāmaṭṭhehi samādhi, sarivattanikehi*. See [2b] above & UA 268.

<sup>251</sup> *Shammānam apātubhāvā*. The phrase “the occurrence of phenomena” (*dhammānam pātubhāvā*) refers to the rise and fall of the five aggregates, the six sense-bases and so on, that should be watched skillfully.

The Buddha then goes on to explain how **the diligent noble disciple** not only has the four limbs of streamwinning but also “makes further effort in solitude by day and in seclusion by night”—such a noble disciple is one who dwells diligently (*ariya, sāvako appamāda, vihārī*)” (S 55.40/5:398).

## 6.6 RELIGION FOR MENTAL HEALTH

### 6.6.1 Buddhist mythology

6.6.1.1 A GOOD BUDDHIST COMMUNITY. In this study, as in the rest of the Sutta Discovery series specifically, and in my approach to Buddhism generally, I have tried to consistently explain, even defend, Buddhism (especially early Buddhism) from the mythical, psychological and spiritual angles. “**Mythical**” here refers to stories and images “that are conceived as concrete and objective, yet participate in spiritual events, realities, and meanings.”<sup>252</sup>

The mythical, however, is not just stories and images, but on a deeper level, refers to how these stories and images, or narratives and visions, powerfully guide our lives as a community. But a community is not a mob, because it is able to do things in a *concerted* and *constructive* manner, and as such has a strong influence on the common conduct of a significant number of people, including those who may not belong to that community.

Early Buddhism is not only at the root of the different Buddhisms today, but inevitably influences other religions who are attracted to its strengths, such as its contemplative practices. Various disciplines of the mind-sciences are even now studying Buddhist teachings on the mind, and examining and experimenting with various Buddhist meditation methods. The Buddhist “community,” if we take the word to mean anyone attracted to Buddhism or practising some aspect of it (especially its meditation), is very difficult to measure statistically; but its size is very considerable, and a fast growing one, albeit almost silently.

6.6.1.2 A BUDDHIST ETHIC. A large number of Buddhists, especially those following the East Asian Mahāyāna tradition, believe in Amitābha’s buddha-field, Sukhā, vatī or Pure Land, as an actual after-life paradise, or as an ideal state of being, or as the Pure Mind.<sup>253</sup> Such a belief tends to deeply or subtly influence the lives of its believers, that is, how they view life (living beings), living (their actions, livelihood, etc), and the environment.<sup>254</sup> Historically, such a *mythology* has a healthy influence on believers who are generally positive about life and are tolerant, even nurturing, of others.

A mythology of religion, more specifically *a mythology of Buddhism*, should be presented and understood in a healthy and nurturing way in the face of social and global realities. This is a dimension of Buddhist narrative and vision that inspires a harmonious life-centred ethic, where this present world itself and our lives’ realities are viewed in the reflected light of the mythical paradises. We can make this world a better one, or we can at least better our immediate environment. These wholesome ideals must find practical and wholesome expression in this present world that includes other humans and life-forms. This is the ethical dimension of our Buddhist lives.

6.6.1.3 ROOTS OF BUDDHIST MYTHOLOGY. Mythology is the narrative of a community’s awareness of itself. It is based on *a collective memory* that justifies or legitimizes common social responses or an expected code of conduct of people as a group. Buddhist mythology, then, inspires a display of *our collective karma*. We tend to act in a certain predictable way, good or bad, driven by the kind of mythology that we feed on or are fed with.

On a positive side, the heart of Buddhist mythology is the Buddha, the eternal hero. The acts of the Buddha and his noble saints (the noble sangha) are the stories that define our mythology of good and spiritual progress. It is a living mythology that is fed by the experiences and visions of Buddhists as a wholesome community. It is how we, as a Buddhist community, see ourselves, whether as a global community (the sangha of the four quarters or a global assembly) or as a local community.

<sup>252</sup> Gomez 1996:29.

<sup>253</sup> Gomes 1996:259.

<sup>254</sup> **Lynn White Jr**, in an influential article, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (1967), eg, argues that Judaeo-Christian religious assumptions that underlie Western culture are largely at the root of the attitudes that he blames for our environmental degradation. See **The Three Roots Inc**, SD 31.12 (6.1.1.2).

A negative Buddhist mythology is one that is strongly ethnic or tribal, so that it is narrow in vision and limited in growth, and ultimately self-destructive, if it turns into wholesale narcissism. Self-view is transposed onto a community level, with the limiting notion that there is such a thing as a pure race or an eternal tribe. At its most infantile level, it is simply group loyalty at the cost of wholesome fellowship and social harmony.

Yet ethnic Buddhism must exist, as it is the way of ancient communities. It is a positive force in holding together the values and ways rooted in an old form of Buddhism, very much coloured by that culture. This is the Buddhism of such communities as the Indians, the Sinhalese, the Myanmarese, the Thais, the Laotians, the Cambodians, the Vietnamese, the Japanese, the Koreans, the Chinese, and an array of western Buddhists. Even such communal Buddhisms, too, must skillfully respond to new challenges, especially in new environments. For, if they do not evolve to answer such challenges, then they would surely shrivel away, even become extinct.

### **6.6.2 The Buddhist path to liberation**

6.6.2.1 RELIGION OF THE CROWD. The term “**psychological**” here refers to the functioning of our minds and hearts, that is, how we think and feel. On this level, we need to carefully examine how Buddhist mythology, doctrines and conduct affect the individual believer or practitioner. Do these religious dynamics open our minds to a wholesome world-view so that we can healthily accommodate the views of others? Or, do they make us more racist, tribal, individualistic, or even narcissistic? Do they help us progress or do they force us to regress?

Religion is the mind’s light, whose shadow can be darkest where it is brightest. Religion, especially where a common faith and tribal loyalty must be shown without question, are most unhealthy and most destructive. This is the way of the herd, the myth of the crowd, where anyone who even appears different might be struck down hard with the hammer of dogma and intolerance. Such religious chains can be more insidious than any prison we can imagine.<sup>255</sup>

6.6.2.2 THE SPACIOUSNESS OF TRUE INDIVIDUALITY. A healthy Buddhist mythology, on the other hand, appreciated in the light of the Dharma and expressed in daily conduct, is a key factor in the moulding of the individual. On a deeper level, this refers to how we become *true* individuals, that is, emotionally independent persons who are wholesomely responsive to others and respectful to our environment, and yet spontaneously happy, independent of the external conditions.<sup>256</sup>

At best, the ideal society, an ethically wholesome and healthy community, can only be an *environment* for the nurturing of healthy individuals. If the *mythical* dimension of Buddhism underpins our conduct and communication (or body and speech), then the *psychological* dimension is the inner realm of our minds and hearts, how we think and feel. This is the psychology of Buddhism, which provides the tools and techniques for the *individuating* of our being, how we find the courage and wisdom to stand above the faceless crowd and noisy clutter of our lives to discover our true self.

6.6.2.3 THE TRUE INDIVIDUAL AND THE WORLD. A true individual is one who sees and understands the world as it is and responds accordingly. Firstly, he relates healthily to *the living world* of humans and other life-forms, respecting *life* as the most valuable quality. He understands how this life-centeredness is the foundation of the five precepts.<sup>257</sup>

He understands how we, as social beings, need *myths* to put some meaning into our lives, and *images* to drive us on with purpose. Yet, he understands, too, that no matter how powerful and necessary these myths and images may seem, they are all social and mental constructs that grease and smoothen the flow

<sup>255</sup> Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s Reich Minister of Propaganda (1933-1945), says: “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.” (*Die Tagebücher des Doktor Josef Göbbels. Geschichte & Vermarktung*, ed Peter-Ferdinand Foch, 1988). Instead of “the State,” read “Religion,” and we find it just as true.

<sup>256</sup> On emotional independence, see SD 40a.8.

<sup>257</sup> See **Veḷu,dvāreyya S** (S 55.7/5:352-356) & SD 1.5.



of a functional society. It allows people to work and play together as a healthy group. This is the work-house and playground of human social evolution.

Secondly, he respects *the physical space* around him, that is, the bubble of life that we call nature or the earth.<sup>258</sup> This is the space that provides us with respite and recovery when social living seems to stress us up. Such a space is both healing and enriching. It energizes us with renewed health and clears our minds so that we can re-touch our creative depths to bring beauty into this world.<sup>259</sup> Beauty is the expression of truth; beauty *must* be the expression of truth.

6.6.2.4 TRUE INDIVIDUALITY. Truth and beauty are the pillars of spiritual friendship, the appreciative joy and love between and amongst true individuals, and mentorship of a meditation guide for one on the inner journey. Spiritual friendship is the quest for *truth*, an understanding of true reality and also a full taste of it.<sup>260</sup> Such an experience is a celebration of true *beauty*, the peak of feeling.<sup>261</sup>

Although we might accidentally bump into the face of truth in a moment of excruciating darkness, or by chance run into the arms of beauty in a fleeting rapturous break, these liberating moments are soon forgotten, drowned in the clutter of our daily grind, or they merely twinkle like a distant star in the night skies of our memories. The point is that we need to cultivate our minds in wise attention so that it is prepared for the dawn of truth and beauty.

The first step towards becoming a true individual is the ability and willingness to renounce *our body*, that is, to unplug, to silence, at least momentarily, the ringing phones that are our eye, ear, nose, tongue and body, so that we can fully focus only on the mind, our interminably busy memory factory and construction site of private realities. This mind has been the source of discontent and trouble ever since we learned to think. It is not that thinking is bad, but like a sharp knife, it can cut us painfully if we do not use it properly. Yet wisely used, it becomes a flaming sword of wisdom, a super-laser, that cuts down all thoughts.

When we have internally levelled off all our thoughts, we feel a deep sense of relief and satisfaction, as if a huge burden has been lifted from us. We feel like Sisyphus of Greek mythology freed of his sam-saric rock-pushing, sitting at leisure on the hilltop, surveying the heavens.<sup>262</sup> We feel ecstatic because we have thoroughly sloughed off all that otherness, what is not us, not ours, pushed upon us by others, accreted upon us through our physical senses. We are finally free from what others think, say or do that affect us; we are free from having to measure ourselves against others—at least momentarily—but this moment feels like eternity and is well worth it

What are we left with when we have renounced all our thoughts? We are free from *knowing* (as we understand it). We are free from the knowing that is dependent on *thoughts*, which are in turn dependent on *words*. But, the word is not the thing; the name is not the thing named [6.3]—in fact, there is really no thing and nothing to name.<sup>263</sup> We seem to simply need to name names, and all that we can know are but words, words, words, and names, names, names. But our spellings are often different or unclear, and so we often disagree and wrangle.

Once the forest of thoughts is cleared, we are left with the spreading shady tree of feeling. We now truly know what joy is, what pain is, what boredom is. We are able to rise above them on account of the joy of mirror-like equanimity, the wordless bliss, now that all our tasks are done, with nothing more to do. We feel spacious as the heavens, and still as space itself. We have returned to our true home, as it were.

When, from this senseless respite, we return to the world of the senses, we at first find it to be an insane noisy clutter, but we quickly attune ourselves to be in harmony with everything, accepting them unconditionally. For, that is the way things are at the sensible level. We are *in* the world, but no more *of* the

<sup>258</sup> On the 3 kinds of worlds, see **Rohitassa S** (S 2.26), SD 7.2 (1) for details.

<sup>259</sup> See **Bad friendship**, SD 64.17 (10.2)

<sup>260</sup> On spiritual friendship, see SD 34.1.

<sup>261</sup> On feeling, see **Vedanā**, SD 17.3.

<sup>262</sup> On the myth of **Sisyphus**, see **Yodh'ājīva S** (S 42.3), SD 23.3 Intro.

<sup>263</sup> Further, see **Saṅkhāra**, SD 17.6.

world. We are healthy amongst the sick; we are untroubled amongst the troubled<sup>264</sup>—we are in a better position to help others.

### **6.6.3 Buddhist spirituality**

6.6.3.1 RELIGION IS A WORD-CONSTRUCTION. The purpose of Buddhism, surely of early Buddhism, is to rise above itself, to rise above ourselves, to be a raft to cross the waters of selfishness, craving and ignorance, for the safe far shore of awakening. As we have seen, Buddhist mind-training allows us to be free from the clutter and caprice of thought. If we can rise above *thoughts*, then we also understand the true nature of *words*. If we do not allow words and sounds to trick and mislead us, then we are free from religion and unhealthy thinking.

If we profess a religion or faith, or even if we do not, or we believe only in ourselves, we need to examine our humanity. How *human* are we really? Do we value life, respecting what others *are*, or are we destructive and violent like hell-beings? Do we respect what others have, what makes them happy, or are we pilferers, taking away what we want, measuring and using others like asuras? Do we respect the person of others, or do we feel free to violate others insatiably like pretas? Do we use words merely to have our way, to have a tight hold of others, and bereft of a word for truth in our language? Then we are false and unwise. Are we drunk with wealth and views, thinking that what we *have* is the measure of what we *are*? Then we are still unawakened.

6.6.3.2 PURE LAND IN OUR HEARTS. “Sukhāvātī” is merely a word, “Pure Land” is only a sound, 淨土 is a word, *jìngtǔ* is a sound. We have created Amitābha; we have constructed Sukhāvātī; we call it Pure Land. If we are able to understand this, then we have truly reached it. For Amitābha is emptiness; emptiness is Amitābha. There is no Pure Land, no *jìngtǔ* out there. It is not “west of us,...a hundred thousand million buddha-fields from where we are.” The universe has no east, no south, no west, no north, nor any direction in between; neither here nor there. We locate and name these points in emptiness, just as a mathematician talks about a point, a very fine point, useful in words and thoughts, but ultimately non-existent.

The Pure Land is not a great distance west of us, but it is beautifully located in all its splendour in the joy of our inner awakening. The Dharma of *words* is only a teaching, words at their best. The Dharma of *practice* is only a path for a journey to inner awakening that we must make for ourselves. The Dharma of *awakening*, on a simple level, is the realization

that we are naturally incapable of taking life, our own or another’s;

that we do not even think of taking what is not ours, nor to be envious of others, but to share our own goodness;

that we are simply incapable of raping or violating another no matter how highly attained or powerful we are;

that we would never lie for any amount of gain nor out of fear of loss, but be wise in telling the truth, timely and healing;

and that we fully respect our mind, never to cloud nor pollute it with substances; for, it is the doorway to full awakening.

When we keep to all these precepts, then we have truly created a pure land right where we are. Then, our mind is *the Buddha*—for, we never lose sight of the teacher; our words are *Dharma*, guiding, healing, awakening; and our actions are *Sangha*, fostering fellowship which ennoble us, freeing us from the rude and rowdy crowd to become true individuals.

We have lived through generations of religious intolerance and bloodshed, and religious wars and religion’s violation of others in every imaginable way. As the light of new learning and wisdom exorcises the dark shadows of religion, we thankfully see less and less bull and bullying by religion. But the task is still uphill. For, religion today is big business, and moneytheism<sup>265</sup> is now the most widespread religion,

<sup>264</sup> Dh 29; A 6.10.5/3:286 f), SD 15.3.

<sup>265</sup> Apparently, this neologism was coined by S Rajaratnam, a leading Singapore politician in the mid- or late 1980s (Irene Ng, *The Singapore Lion: A biography of S Rajaratnam*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2010:345).

even more powerful, albeit more subtle, than the old-style faiths. We still need to work hard to free ourselves from them.

This is the millennium of the mind. We now better understand the workings of the mind, and we are more familiar with the character and conduct of religions from centuries and millennia of religious history. We now have better tools of exposing religion for what it really is: a wall of words and thoughts to enclose the tribe, and exclude the other. We have methods of cultivating the mind and freeing the heart to discover inner peace and the unconditional acceptance of others.

None of these, bad or good, must be taken for granted. We need to expressly reject the false and the harmful, and avowedly declare the good and the healing. As long as we speak up—silence is no option—and timely speak, and speak well, we will be heard. Those who listen will be freed by their own efforts. For the Buddha’s message is very simple: you can yourself free yourself from ignorance and evil. (Dh 160, 380)

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## The Discourse on Mahā Sudassana

D 17

Thus have I heard.

### Origin story (*nidāna*)

**1** <sup>266</sup>At one time, the Blessed One was staying between the twin sal trees at in the sal grove of the Mallas at Upavattana,<sup>267</sup> near Kusinārā, at the time of the final passing-away [parinirvana].<sup>268</sup>

1.2 <sup>269</sup>Then the venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One. Having approached the Blessed One, the venerable Ānanda sat down at one side. Seated thus on one side, the venerable Ānanda said this to the Blessed One:<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> *Ekam samayaṃ bhagavā kusinārāyaṃ viharati upavattane mallānaṃ sālavane antarena yamaka,sālānaṃ parinibbāna,samaye.*

<sup>267</sup> The row of sāla-trees stretched from south-west corner of Kusinārā eastwards and then northwards towards the southern city-gate. The grove was SW of Kusinārā (UA 238). **Upavattana** (Skt *upavartana* = recreation ground): the sāl grove there belongs to the Mallas of Kusinārā, their capital (D 2:137). **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16) says that it is located on “the farther bank of the Hirañña,vatī river” (D 16.5.1/2:137), SD 9. Upavattana is prob the name of the locality in which the grove was located: see Dīpv 6.19 & long def & refs at BHSD: upavartana.

<sup>268</sup> As at **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16), but after other details (D 16.5.1-16/2:137-145), SD 9. The Hirañña,vatī river runs by the Upavattana sal grove. Crossing the **Hirañña,vatī** (Skt *Hiranyavatī*), the Buddha reaches the Upavattana sal grove of the Mallas (D 2:146, 170; S 1:157 = A 2:79; J 1:392, 5:278; Divy 152 ff). The river is today called the Little Gandak, flowing through district of Gorakhpur about 13 km (8 mi) to the west of the Great Gandak and falls into the Ghogra. Kusinārā is located near modern Kasia in the district of Deoria, Uttar Pradesh. The site of **Kusinārā** is certainly to be in the extensive ruins near the present village of Kasia at the junction of the Rapti river and the Little Gandak river (the ancient *Hiranyavatī*, a tributary of the Śarayu or Ghaghara), 60 km (37 mi) east of Gorakhpur and on the border of North Bihar. The Mallas of Kusinārā and the Mallas of Pāvā were located to the east and south of the Koliyas. See J Finegan, *An Archaeological History of Religions of Indian Asia*, 1989:81 f.

<sup>269</sup> §§1.2-1.3.4 are as at **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,5.17-18/2:169 f). This episode is not found in the Tibetan Dulva version.

<sup>270</sup> Ānanda’s remark here regarding Kusinārā is recounted in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,5.17/2:146), SD 9 & **Mahā Sudassana J** (J 95/1:391), SD 35.17.

“Bhante, please do not pass into parinirvana in this little township, a barren little township, a jungle outpost.<sup>271</sup> There are, bhante, other great cities, that is to say, Campā, Rājagaha, Sāvattihī, Sāketa, Kosambī, Benares.

Pass into parinirvana there, bhante. There are many wealthy kshatriyas there, many wealthy brahmins there, many wealthy householders there who are great in faith in the Tathāgata. They would perform the funeral rites of the Tathāgata.”

**1.3** “Say not so, Ānanda! Say not so, Ānanda, that **Kusinārā** is a little township, a barren little township, a jungle outpost.

### The royal city of Kusāvātī

**1.3.2 KUSĀ, VĀTĪ’S PROSPERITY.** Once upon a time, Ānanda, there was a head-anointed kshatriya rajah<sup>272</sup> named **Mahā Sudassana**, conqueror of the 4 quarters, who brought stability to the country.<sup>273</sup> This Kusinārā, Ānanda, is<sup>274</sup> the rajah Mahā Sudassana’s royal city named **Kusāvātī**: it is 12 yojanas long<sup>275</sup> to east and 12 yojanas long to the west, 7 yojanas wide<sup>276</sup> to the north and 7 yojanas wide to the south.<sup>277</sup>

**1.3.3** And, Ānanda, the royal city of Kusāvātī is wealthy and prosperous, with a large population, crowded with humans and replete with food. Ānanda, it is like the celestial city of the devas called **Āḷakamandā**,<sup>278</sup> wealthy and prosperous, with a large population, crowded with yakshas and replete with food. Even so, Ānanda, is the royal city of Kusāvātī wealthy and prosperous, with a large population, crowded with humans and replete with food.

**1.3.4** And Ānanda, the royal city of Kusāvātī, night and day would resound with ten sounds, that is to say, elephant sound, horse sound, chariot sound, drum sound, mirutangkam [barrel drum]<sup>279</sup> sound, vina<sup>280</sup>

<sup>271</sup> *Mā bhante bhagavā imasmim khuddaka, nagarake ujjāṅgala, nagarake sākha, nagarake parinibbāyi.*

<sup>272</sup> Mahā Sudassana is referred to as a “head-anointed kshatriya rajah” (*rājā ... khattiyo muddhāvasitto*) in **Go, maya S** (S 22.96/3:144). Although the phrase, *rājā ... khattiya muddhāvasitta* occurs twice here [§§1.3.2, 1.3.7], it is omitted from the def of a wheel-turner in **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16), **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14), **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16) & **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30); also omitted from Lalita, vistara. Apparently, this difference is deliberate: Mahā Sudassana is not described as a “wheel-turner” here because he becomes one only later [§1.7.3] (Gethin 2006:80 f). See foll n.

<sup>273</sup> *Janapada-t, thāvāriya-p, patto*, ie, he has brought social and political stability, and he is secure in the country: see DA 1:250, 2:443; MA 3:365; SA 1:167; SnA 2:449. Here, **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16) adds “who was endowed with the seven jewels” (*satta, ratana, samannāgato*), ie, he is a wheel-turner (D 16.5.18/2:146): see prec n.

<sup>274</sup> I have used the narrative present as from here on, the instructions are meant to be a visualization exercise.

<sup>275</sup> About 135 km (84 mi) either way, ie 270 km (168 mi) long.

<sup>276</sup> About 79 km (49 mi) either way, ie 158 km (98 mi) wide.

<sup>277</sup> As at **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16.5.18/2:146), SD 9. As a whole, 24 yojanas (about 135 km) long in latitude and 14 yojanas (79 km) wide in longitude. *Rañño Ānanda Mahā, sudassanassa ayam Kusinārā Kusāvātī nāma rāja, -dhāni ahoṣi, puratthimena ca pacchimena ca dvādasa yojanāni āyāmena, uttarena ca dakkhiṇena ca satta yojanāni vitthārena*. See Intro 2.1.1 n (league).

<sup>278</sup> **Āḷakamandā** was the royal city of Kuvera, the king of Uttara, kuru, the northern continent (D 3:201). It is possible that this was an allusion to **Alexandria**, of which there were at least 11 ancient cities founded by Alexander the Great in the course of his campaigns (334-323 BCE). Alexandria on the Indus, founded in 325 near the confluence of the **Indus river** with the Hydaspes, the Acesines and the Hyphasis rivers, perhaps identifiable with Uch, in Bahawalpur (Pakistan). Alexandria in **Gedrosia**, founded in 325: the modern Bela, in Pakistan. Both of these cities were to the “north” of the Gangetic plain. If this allusion were made, than this portion of the sutta was added just before or during Asoka’s reign (c 265-238 BCE or c 273-232). Cf **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26) prediction of India and Ketu, matī in the distant future (D 26.23/3:76).

<sup>279</sup> “Mirutangkam,” tom-tom or mridanga (*mudiṅga*, vl *mutiṅga*; Skt *mṛdaṅga*, lit “body of clay”), a double-headed Indian barrel drum, related to the modern *mridanga*. As at **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,90/2:79), SD 8.10. See also **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17,1.3.4), SD 36.12 & **Āṇi S** (S 20.7,2/2:266 f), SD 11.13 for n & picture.



sound, the sound of singing, cymbal sound, gong sound, and the sound of ‘Enjoy! Drink! Eat!’ [‘Eat, drink and be merry!’].<sup>281</sup> These are the ten sounds.<sup>282</sup>

**1.4 KUSĀ,VĀTĪ’S 7 WALLS.** The royal city of Kusā,vatī, Ānanda, is surrounded by seven walls. One wall is made of gold; one of silver; one of beryl; one of crystal, [171] one of ruby,<sup>283</sup> one of sapphire; one of all the jewels.<sup>284</sup>

**1.5 KUSĀ,VĀTĪ’S GATES.** The royal city of Kusā,vatī, Ānanda, has gates of four kinds.<sup>285</sup> One gate is of gold; one of silver; one of beryl; and one of crystal.

1.5.2 At each gate are sunk seven pillars, each thrice a man’s height in circumference, sunk to the depth of three men’s height, and with the height of twelve men.<sup>286</sup> One pillar is made of gold; one of silver; one of beryl; one of crystal; one of ruby; one of sapphire; one of all the jewels.

**1.6 THE PALM TREES AROUND KUSĀ,VĀTĪ.** The royal city of Kusā,vatī, Ānanda, is encircled by seven rows of palm trees. One row of palm trees is made of gold; one of silver; one of beryl; one of crystal; one of ruby; one of sapphire; one of all the jewels.<sup>287</sup>

1.6.2 The gold palm has	a golden trunk,	with silver leaves and fruits.
The silver palm has	a silver trunk,	with golden leaves and fruits.
The beryl palm has	a beryl trunk,	with crystal leaves and fruits.
The crystal palm has	a crystal trunk,	with beryl leaves and fruits.
The ruby palm has	a ruby trunk,	with sapphire leaves and fruits.
The sapphire palm has	a sapphire trunk,	with ruby leaves and fruits.

<sup>280</sup> “Vina,” *vīṇā*, Hindi “bīn,” a family of Indian stringed instruments, basically stick zither, having a narrow neck, neckless, non-resonating body with strings running the entire length. Vinas, usually 7-stringed and fretted, appear in many sizes and shapes. The classical vina of northern Indian (Hindustani) music, a difficult solo instrument, has a large resonating gourd under each end of body and high, movable frets. Vina may also refer generically to stringed instruments. Before about 1000, it may have referred to an arched harp. (Ency Brit 15<sup>th</sup> ed)

<sup>281</sup> Comy glosses all 3 verbs—*asnātha pivatha khādatha*—as *bhuñjatha*, “consume, enjoy!” (DA 587).

<sup>282</sup> This list of 10 sounds are given in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16.5.18/2:147, of Ālakamandā), **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17.1.3.4/2:170, of Kusā,vatī) & **Nidāna,kathā** (of Amara, city of the past Buddha Siddhattha, J 1:3). The Skt version mentions 12 sounds (cf D 2:170,11-16; Matsumura 1988:3,9-11). For a description of a crowded society and metropolis, see **Cakka,vatti Sihanāda S** (D 26.23/3:75), SD 36.10.

<sup>283</sup> The Skt (eg *Sukhāvātī,vyūha S* ch 16) reads *lohita,muktā* (“red pearl”).

<sup>284</sup> *Eko pākāro sovaṇṇa,mayo, eko rūpiya,mayo, eko veḷuriya,mayo, eko phalika,mayo, eko lohitaṅka,mayo, eko masāra,galla,mayo, eko sabba,ratana,mayo.* **Masāra,galla** is best rendered as “sapphire,” as it is said to be the “blue” of the colour *kasina* (DA 2:632) [4.2.2.3]. It is often tr as “cat’s eye” (eg PED) or coral (BHSD: *musāra, musāgalva*): “cat’s eye is really a gem characteristic, ie chatoyancy, rather than a gem proper. *Masāra,galla* is actually *māsara* (Skt *musāra*), “emerald” + *galla* (Skt *galva*), “crystal.” If taken as a dvandva, we have two kinds of stones here. This would total 7 kinds of precious objects, not counting the last, which is a conglomerate. It is also called *kabara,maṇi* (VvA 304, where a similar list is given). In the Skt version, in addition to these 7 walls, Kusā,vatī is surrounded by 7 moats (*parikhā*) (Matsumura 1988:3,9-11).

<sup>285</sup> *Vaṇṇa*, usu tr as “colour,” but here (depending on the context) is best rendered as “kind/s.” On the different senses of *vaṇṇa*, see KhpA 114 f.

<sup>286</sup> Be Se *Ek’ekasmim dvāre satta satta esikā nikhātā ahesum, ti,poris’aṅgā catu,porisa,nikhātā dvā.dasa,porisā ubbedhena.* Ce ..., *ti,poris’aṅgā ti,porisa,nikhātā dvā,dasa,porisā ubbedhena.* Ee *Ekam-ekasmim dvāre satta esikā nikhātā ahesum ti,poris’aṅgā catu,porisā ubbedhena.* As noted by Gethin, this interestingly seems closer to the **Mahā,vastu**’s description of the royal city of Dīpa,vatī, the city of Dīpaṅkara’s father, Arcimat, than to the Skt **Mahā Sudarśana Sūtra**. In Mvst, Dīpa,vatī is described in very similar terms to Kusā,vatī: in front of its gate there are pillars “which were embedded in the ground to the depth of three men’s lengths, werethree men’s length in circumference, and twelve men’s length in height” (*tripauruṣa,naikhānyāni tripauruṣa,parigoḥyāni dvādasa,pauruṣa udvedhena*, Mvst 1:196) (2006:73).

<sup>287</sup> *Ekā tāla,panti sovaṇṇa,mayā, ekā rūpiya,mayā, ekā veḷuriya,mayā, ekā phalika,mayā, ekā lohitaṅka,mayā, ekā masāra.galla,mayā, ekā sabba,ratanamayā.* The tr follows the Pali; alt, it can be read as “One row has palm trees made of gold...” etc.

On §§1.6.1-2, cf §1.26.7 below.

The all-jewelled palm has an all-jewelled trunk, with all-jewelled leaves and fruits.

1.6.3 THE SOUNDS OF KUSAVĀTĪ. And the sound of those palm trees, Ānanda, when stirred by the wind, is lovely, delightful, pleasant, intoxicating.

Ānanda, just as the sound of the five kinds of musical instruments, well-tuned, well played, very skillfully harmonized together is lovely, delightful, pleasant, intoxicating, [172]

even so, too, Ānanda, is the sound of those palm trees, when stirred by the wind, is lovely, delightful, pleasant, intoxicating.

1.6.4 And at that time, too, Ānanda, in the royal city of Kusā, vātī, revellers, drinkers and the thirsty dance<sup>288</sup> around to the sound of those palm trees stirred by the wind.<sup>289</sup>

## The 7 jewels [treasures]

1.7 Ānanda, the rajah Mahā, sudassana is endowed with 7 jewels and 4 kinds of splendid qualities [charismatic qualities].<sup>290</sup>

What are the seven?<sup>291</sup>

1.7.2 MAHĀ SUDASSANA KEEPS THE UPOSATHA.<sup>292</sup> Here, Ānanda, on the observance day [uposatha], the fifteenth,<sup>293</sup> king Mahā Sudassana, having washed his head and gone up to the roof-terrace of the palace,<sup>294</sup> had kept the observance, the divine wheel jewel appears with its thousand spokes, rim and hub, and complete in all aspects.’

1.7.3 MAHĀ SUDASSANA BECOMES A WHEEL-TURNER. When king Mahā Sudassana sees it, this occurs to him:

‘Now I have heard that when, on the observance day, the fifteenth, a head-anointed kshatriya rajah, having washed his head and gone to the roof-terrace of the royal palace,<sup>295</sup> had kept the observance, and the divine wheel jewel appears with its thousand spokes, rim and hub, and complete in all aspects, then that king is a wheel-turner.

Surely I’m a wheel-turner!’<sup>296</sup>

<sup>288</sup> *Paricāresum* (3 aor pl) of *paricāreti*, “he amuses himself” (V 2:190, 3:72 ; D 1:36, 104; A 1:504; Tha 96; Pv 1.11.6, 4.1.29). Comy glosses as “they sported, shaking their hands or feet, or dancing” (*hattham vā pādam vā cāle-tvā naccantā kīlīmsu*, DA 2:627).

<sup>289</sup> *Ye kho pan’ānanda, tena samayena kusā, vatiyā rāja, dhāniyā dhuttā ahesum soṇḍā pipāsā, te tāsam tāla, pantī-nam vāteritānam saddena paricāresum*. Here, “the thirsty” (*pipāsā*) is figurative, ie, incl the loose and lustful.

<sup>290</sup> “Splendid qualities” (*iddhi*), here refers to his attractive qualities. These 4 qualities are explained very much further down [§18]. It seems that the whole section of the 7 jewels [§§1.7.2-1.17.3] has been interpolated here. Even without this section, the narrative still flows very well.

<sup>291</sup> The 7 jewels are: (1) the wheel jewel [§§1.8-11], (2) the elephant jewel [§1.12], (3) the horse jewel [§1.13], (4) the gem jewel [§1.14], (5) the woman jewel [§1.15], (6) the steward jewel [§1.16] and (7) the commander jewel [§1.17]. This passage is unique in not shortlisting the 7 jewels, and right away listing them in detail. Its lateness is evident.

<sup>292</sup> This whole section as at **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26.5f/3:61), SD 36.10. Cf Lalv 11 (Vaidya).

<sup>293</sup> “This observance day, the fifteenth” (*tad-ah’uposathe paṇṇarase*). This passage recurs in **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17.1.7.2/2:72 @ SD 36.12) & **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26.4c/3:60), SD 36.10. In the latter (D 26), there is a strong hint that sovereignty is neither a birthright nor God’s will, but the king’s moral worth. On the observance itself, see (**Tad-ah’**) **Uposatha S** (A 3.70/1:205-215), SD 4.18.

<sup>294</sup> Cf Ajāta, sattu in the opening of **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.1/1:47), SD 8.10.

<sup>295</sup> *Upari, pāsāda, vara, gato*, here *vara* (“best”) is tr as “royal,” a common phrase: V 1:345,23, 4:112,2, 158,15; **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.1.2/1:47,8), SD 8.10; **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17.1.7.2/172,15×2), SD 36.12; **Pāyāsi S** (D 23.9/2:325,8), SD 39.4; **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26.5/3:61,24+30), SD 36b.10; **Mahā Gosiṅga S** (M 32,6/-1:213,28), SD 44.12; **Makhā Deva S** (M 83,13/2:79,11), SD 60.8; **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129,34/3:172,15×2), SD 2.22; (**Piṇḍa**) **Mallikā S** (S 3.8/1:75,3+14 = U 5.1/47,4+14), SD 38.7; VA 4:880 (def); DA 1:140 (def), 2:517; MA 2:254 (“7- or 9-storied”), 4:214; SA 3:21; AA 1:292, 316, 451; KhpA 172; SnA 1:278; UA 273 (def); CA 55; PvA 75, 105,25, 216, 279. See PED: *vara*<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>296</sup> *Assam nu kho aham rājā cakka, vattī’ti*. This is an optative structure expressing surprise, like when the Ugly Duckling realizes, “I am a Swan!” (S Collins 1998: 484).

**1.8 (1) THE WHEEL JEWEL.** Then, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana, having risen from his seat, having arranged his upper robe to one shoulder, taking a pitcher in his left hand, and sprinkles **the wheel jewel** with his right hand, saying,

‘Turn, good wheel jewel! Conquer, good wheel jewel!’<sup>297</sup>

### The wheel-turner’s world conquest<sup>298</sup>

**1.9 THE EAST.** Then, the wheel jewel rolls to the eastern quarter, and king Mahā Sudassana follows it with his fourfold army.<sup>299</sup>

In whatever region, Ānanda, that the wheel jewel stops, [173] king Mahā Sudassana goes there with his fourfold army.

The opposing kings of the eastern quarter approach king Mahā Sudassana. Having approached king Mahā Sudassana, they say this to him:

‘Come, maharajah! Welcome, maharajah! This is yours, maharajah! Instruct us, maharajah!’<sup>300</sup>

King Mahā Sudassana speaks thus:

‘You should not kill living beings.	<i>pāṇo na hantabbo</i>
You should not take the not-given.	<i>adinnaṃ nādātabbam</i>
You should not commit sexual misconduct.	<i>kāmesu micchā na caritabbā</i>
You should not speak falsehood.	<i>musā na bhāsitabbā</i>
You should not take intoxicants.	<i>majjaṃ na pātabbam</i>
And govern as you have done before.’ <sup>301</sup>	<i>yathā, bhuttañ ca bhuñjatha</i>

Then, Ānanda, the opposing kings of the eastern quarter become vassals of king Mahā Sudassana.

**1.10 THE SOUTH.** Then, the wheel jewel rolls to the southern quarter, and king Mahā Sudassana follows it with his fourfold army.

<sup>297</sup> *Pavattatu bhavaṃ cakka, ratanaṃ, abhivijjātu bhavaṃ cakka, ratanaṃ ti.* This and the foll sections [§§1.7.2-11] (on the Wheel Jewel) as at **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26.6-7b/3:62 f), SD 36.10 (except for the closing line) & parallel **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129.35/3:172 f), SD 2.22.

<sup>298</sup> On the connection of this to the “horse-sacrifice” (*aśva, medha*), see **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26.6/3:62), SD 36.10 n.

<sup>299</sup> “The fourfold army” (*catur-aṅga sena*), ie, foot-soldiers (infantry), horses (cavalry), elephants (artillery) and chariots (D 2:190 J 2:102 104 Vism 146 SnA 225 353 DhA 4:144; cf J 6:275). *Catur* is an etymological root of the modern word *chess*, and is the Malay word for “chess,” orig a favourite game of royalty in ancient India and Persia. In chess, the infantry, cavalry, elephants, and chariots, are represented respectively by pawn, knight, bishop, and rook. See H J R Murray, *A History of Chess*, Oxford, 1913.

<sup>300</sup> One effective way to appreciate this otherwise parody-like statement, indeed, the whole Sutta itself, is to envision it as a morality play, where such actions are stylized gestures reflecting the basis for a utopia. See D:RD 3:63; S Collins 1998:484.

<sup>301</sup> This para is an abr form of the 5 precepts (*pañca, sīla*), which, together with a sixth: *yathā, bhuttañ ca bhuñjatha*, are also found verbatim at: **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17,1.9/2:173), SD 36.12, **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26,6/-3:62, 63), SD 36.10, **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129,35/3:173), SD 2.22. See PED: *bhutta*. It is also related to *bhojaka*, as in the commentarial term, *gāma, bhojaka*, “village chief, squire” (J 1:199, 2:134; MA 2:252; DhA 1:69): see Auboyer 1965:42-46. Apparently, the wheel-turner expects some moral standard from his subject-kings, while continuing to rule their kingdoms (cf Collins 1998:605 n12). The sentence *yathā, bhuttañ ca bhuñjatha* (D 2:173 = 3:62, 63, 3:64) is problematic: there is a wordplay (*śleṣa*) on the 2 forms of *bhuñjati* (“he enjoys”), ie (1) takes food, or (2) rule, govern (DPL; SED: 3 bhuj). A similar play (a pun) on *bhuñjati* is found in (**Devatā**) **Samiddhi S** (S 42/1.20/1:8), SD 21.4. Scholars have tr it in one of 2 ways: (1) “Take food in moderation” (D:W 281 = 398), or (2) “Rule (or govern) as you have done before” (Holder 2006:178); cf D:RD 3:64 n1. Comy notes that the wheel-turner neither demands tributes nor seizes wealth from the subject-kings (DA 2:622; MA 4:222). The point is that the wheel-turner does not dethrone the conquered kings, but *shares power with them* as his feudatory regents or vassals (*rāja anuyutta*). Collins remarks: “He does not depose the kings he defeats and instal someone else in their stead, which was the standard practice among Indian kings; nor does he intend to unseat them and collect taxes directly himself...all major kings or ‘emperors’ ruled through other intermediary members of the tribute-taking class” (1998:605). On *bhuñjati* = “he governs,” see **Vāseṭṭha S** (M 98,10(26)/2:196 = Sn 619b), SD 37.1. See PED: *bhutta*.

In whatever region, Ānanda, that the wheel jewel stops, king Mahā Sudassana goes there with his fourfold army.

The opposing kings of the southern quarter approach king Mahā Sudassana. Having approached king Mahā Sudassana, they say this to him:

‘Come, maharajah! Welcome, maharajah! This is yours, maharajah! Instruct us, maharajah!’

King Mahā Sudassana speaks thus:

‘You should not kill living beings.

You should not take the not-given.

You should not commit sexual misconduct.

You should not speak falsehood.

You should not take intoxicants.

And govern as you have done before.’

Then, Ānanda, the opposing kings of the southern quarter become vassals of king Mahā Sudassana.

1.10.2 THE WEST. Then, the wheel jewel rolls to the western quarter, and king Mahā Sudassana follows it with his fourfold army.

In whatever region, Ānanda, that the wheel jewel stops, king Mahā Sudassana goes there with his fourfold army.

The opposing kings of the western quarter approach king Mahā Sudassana. Having approached king Mahā Sudassana, they say this to him:

‘Come, maharajah! Welcome, maharajah! This is yours, maharajah! Instruct us, maharajah!’

King Mahā Sudassana speaks thus:

‘You should not kill living beings.

You should not take the not-given.

You should not commit sexual misconduct.

You should not speak falsehood.

You should not take intoxicants.

And govern as you have done before.’

Then, Ānanda, the opposing kings of the western quarter become vassals of king Mahā Sudassana.

1.10.3 THE NORTH. Then, the wheel jewel rolls to the northern quarter, and king Mahā Sudassana follows it with his fourfold army. In whatever region, Ānanda, that the wheel jewel stops, king Mahā Sudassana goes there with his fourfold army.

The opposing kings of the northern quarter approach king Mahā Sudassana. Having approached king Mahā Sudassana, they say this to him:

‘Come, maharajah! Welcome, maharajah! This is yours, maharajah! Instruct us, maharajah!’

King Mahā Sudassana speaks thus:

‘You should not kill living beings.

You should not take the not-given.

You should not commit sexual misconduct. [174]

You should not speak falsehood.

You should not take intoxicants.

And govern as you have done before.’

Then, Ānanda, the opposing kings of the northern quarter become vassals of king Mahā Sudassana.

1.11 Then, Ānanda, the wheel jewel, having conquered the ocean-bound earth, returns to the royal city of Kusā, vātī, to the entrance to king Mahā Sudassana’s inner palace, where it stands, as it were, fixed at its axis,<sup>302</sup> before the justice hall, shining forth on king Mahā Sudassana’s inner palace.<sup>303</sup>

<sup>302</sup> *Akkh’āhata* (M 3:173,26; A 1:112,5), from *akkha*, “an axle” + *āhata*, “fixed,” pp of *āhanati*, “he hits, strikes; fixes,” ie, “fixed at the axle”; “axle-locked” (KhpA:Ñ 187). The meaning, I think, is that the wheel stands mid-air but still turning on its axis. On the wheel jewel, see Intro (3.1).



1.11.2 Such, Ānanda, is the wheel jewel that arises to king Mahā Sudassana.<sup>304</sup>

### The wheel-turner's vehicles

**1.12 (2) THE ELEPHANT JEWEL.** Furthermore, Ānanda, there arises for king Mahā Sudassana the elephant jewel, named Uposatha [Sabbath],<sup>305</sup> the king of elephants, pure white,<sup>306</sup> with the sevenfold support,<sup>307</sup> with supernormal power, capable of flying through the air.

1.12.2 Seeing him, king Mahā Sudassana, his heart inspired, thinks,

‘What an auspicious mount of an elephant, if it were to submit to training!’<sup>308</sup>

Then, Ānanda, the elephant jewel, just as a fine thoroughbred elephant that has been well trained over a long period, submits itself for training.

1.12.3 Once upon a time, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana, just to test the elephant jewel, mounts him at dawn and travels along the horizon of the oceans that bound the land,<sup>309</sup> and then returns to the royal city of Kusā,vātī in time for breakfast.

1.12.4 Such, Ānanda, is the elephant jewel that arises to king Mahā Sudassana.<sup>310</sup>

**1.13 (3) THE HORSE JEWEL.** Furthermore, Ānanda, there arises for king Mahā Sudassana the horse jewel, named Valahaka [Thundercloud], the king of horses, pure white, black-headed, with a mane as soft as munja grass.<sup>311</sup>

1.13.2 Seeing him, king Mahā Sudassana, his heart inspired, thinks,

‘What an auspicious mount of a horse, if it were to submit to training!’

Then, [175] Ānanda, the horse jewel, just as a fine thoroughbred horse that has been well trained over a long period, submits itself for training.

1.13.3 Once upon a time, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana, just to test the horse jewel, mounts him at dawn and travels along the horizon of the oceans that bound the land, and then returns to the royal city of Kusā,vātī in time for breakfast.

1.13.4 Such, Ānanda, is the horse jewel that arises to king Mahā Sudassana.<sup>312</sup>

**1.14 (4) THE GEM JEWEL.** Furthermore, Ānanda, there arises for king Mahā Sudassana the gem jewel. This is a beryl gem of purest water, eight-faceted, well-cut, clear, limpid, faultless, perfect in every way. The radiance of the gem jewel, Ānanda, shines all around for a whole league.<sup>313</sup>

1.14.2 Once upon a time, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana mounts that very gem jewel on the top of his banner and sets forth with his army in the gloomy darkness of the night. Then, Ānanda, the whole village was so thoroughly bright that the villagers set about working, thinking it is day!

1.14.3 Such, Ānanda, is the gem jewel that arises to king Mahā Sudassana.<sup>314</sup>

<sup>303</sup> *Atha kho taṃ ānanda cakka,ratanam samudda,pariyantaṃ paṭhavim ahivijinitvā kusā,vatim rāja,dhānim pac-cāgantvā rañño mahā,sudassanassa ante,pura.dvāre attha.karaṇa-p,pamukhe akkh'āhataṃ maññe aṭṭhāsi, rañño mahā,sudassanassa ante,puram upasobhayamānam.*

<sup>304</sup> *Rañño, ānanda, mahāsudassanassa evarūpaṃ cakkaratanaṃ pāturahosi.*

<sup>305</sup> Lalita,vistara calls him “Bodhi” (Lalv 12, Vaidya)

<sup>306</sup> *Sabba,seto*, ie an albino.

<sup>307</sup> That is, four strong legs, two powerful tusks and its trunk.

<sup>308</sup> *Bhaddakaṃ vata bho hatthi,yānam, sace damathaṃ upeyyā'ti.*

<sup>309</sup> “Travels along...etc,” *samudda,pariyantaṃ paṭhavim anuyāyitvā*. There is a hint here at the earth is regarded as flat, and the king is flying on his elephant along the flat earth's edge. In the early suttas, however, the earth is never said to be flat.

<sup>310</sup> On the elephant jewel, see Intro (3.2).

<sup>311</sup> *Mūjja*, Saccharum munja Roxb, a soft grass, often worn by ancient Indian warriors signifying that they would stand their ground and never retreat (D 2:174; Sn 18, 440).

<sup>312</sup> On the horse jewel, see Intro (3.3).

<sup>313</sup> That is, its brilliance brightens up all around for a league around (7 mi = 11.25 km) (M 129.38/3:174 @ SD 2.22; KhpA 172); even little ants can be clearly seen (KhpA 173).

<sup>314</sup> On the gem jewel, see Intro (3.4).

### The wheel-turner's wealth and pleasures

**1.15 (5) THE WOMAN JEWEL.** Furthermore, Ānanda, there arises for king Mahā Sudassana the woman jewel, exceedingly beautiful, lovely to behold, charming, endowed with perfect beauty of complexion.<sup>315</sup>

1.15.2 King Mahā Sudassana's woman jewel is neither too tall nor too short, neither too thin nor too fat, neither too dark nor too pale, surpassing human beauty, though not reaching divine beauty.

1.15.3 Ānanda, the touch of his woman jewel's body is soft, just like a tuft of cotton-wool or a tuft of kapok. To him, Ānanda, when it is cool, her limbs are warm; when it is warm, her limbs are cool.

1.15.4 Ānanda, his woman jewel's body exudes the scent of sandalwood, and from her mouth the sweetness of lotuses.

1.15.5 Now, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana's woman jewel rises before him [176] and retires after him. She is eager to serve, agreeable in conduct, and sweet in speech. Even in thought, she is never unfaithful to him, what more in body?<sup>316</sup>

1.15.6 Such, Ānanda, is the woman jewel that arises to king Mahā Sudassana.<sup>317</sup>

### The wheel-turner's administrators

**1.16 (6) THE STEWARD JEWEL.** Furthermore, Ānanda, there arises for king Mahā Sudassana the steward jewel.

1.16.2 The steward jewel, as a result of his past karma, is endowed with the divine eye,<sup>318</sup> whereby he sees hidden jewels, both with owner and ownerless.

1.16.3 He approaches king Mahā Sudassana and says this:

'Let your majesty rest easy. I will manage your wealth as it should be managed.'

1.16.4 Once upon a time, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana, just to test the steward jewel, boards a boat and has it steered midstream on the Ganges currents. Then he says to the steward jewel,

'I need gold and silver, steward!'

'In that case, maharajah, go alongside either bank, and point out, "Right here, steward, I have need of gold and silver!"'<sup>319</sup>

1.16.5 Then, Ānanda, the steward jewel feels about<sup>320</sup> in the water with both his hands, and draws up a pot full of gold and silver, and then says to king Mahā Sudassana,

'Is this enough, maharajah? What about this much, maharajah? Is this much of service to you, maharajah?'

1.16.6 King Mahā Sudassana then says this,

'This is enough, steward! This much is enough, steward! This much will serve me, steward!'<sup>321</sup>

1.16.7 Such, Ānanda, is the steward jewel that arises to king Mahā Sudassana.<sup>322</sup> [177]

**1.17 (7) THE COMMANDER JEWEL.** Furthermore, Ānanda, there arises for king Mahā Sudassana the commander jewel.

<sup>315</sup> "Exceedingly beautiful...etc.," *abhirūpā dassanīyā pāsādikā paramāya vaṇṇa,pokkharatāya samannāgatā*, a stock phrase on perfect beauty, also spoken of king Mahā Sudassana [§1.18.2]; also at D 1:114; S 2:279; PvA 46.

<sup>316</sup> M 129.39/3:174 f @ SD 2.22.

<sup>317</sup> On the woman jewel, see Intro (3.5).

<sup>318</sup> This is apparently ordinary clairvoyance, not the knowledge of others' karma (see, for example, D 1:81).

<sup>319</sup> *Tena hi, mahārāja, ekam tīram nāvā upetū'ti, idh'eva me, gahapati, attho hirañña,suvaṇṇenā'ti.*

<sup>320</sup> "Plunges," *omasitvā*, "having plunged," from *omasati*, which has two senses: (1) *o* (= *ava*, meaning "low, despising") + *masati*, "he pierces, strikes," meaning "hurts, pierces, strikes, strikes in a downward direction; attacks verbally" (V 4:4; Tha 3); (2) *o* (= *ava*, meaning "down, downward") + *masati* (Skt *ava* +  $\sqrt{MRŚ}$ , to touch, feel), ie, touches, strokes (in a downward direction) (V 3:121; J 1:295,10\* = V 446,4\*; D 2:176,23 = M 3:175,26). Both CPD & DP takes *omasati* as meaning "to touch," but we sense of "downwards" is missing. The action of the steward is prob that of touching, stirring, and then immersing his hands into the water.

<sup>321</sup> M 129.40/3:175 @ SD 2.22.

<sup>322</sup> On the steward jewel, see Intro (3.6).

1.17.2 He is learned, clever, wise, and competent in telling king Mahā Sudassana to advance when he should, to retreat when he should, to stand his ground when he should.<sup>323</sup>

1.17.3 He approaches king Mahā Sudassana and says this:

‘Let your majesty rest easy. I will advise you.’

1.17.4 Such, Ānanda, is the commander jewel that arises to king Mahā Sudassana.<sup>324</sup>

### The 4 splendid qualities

**1.18** King Mahā Sudassana, Ānanda, is accomplished in the four splendid qualities [charismatic qualities].<sup>325</sup> What are the four splendid qualities?

1.18.2 (1) Here, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana is *extremely handsome*, lovely to behold, charming, endowed with perfect beauty of complexion,<sup>326</sup> surpassing every other human.

King Mahā Sudassana, Ānanda, is endowed with this first splendid quality.

**1.19** (2) Furthermore, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana is *long-lived*, living longer, surpassing any other human.

King Mahā Sudassana, Ānanda, is endowed with this second splendid quality.

**1.20** (3) Furthermore, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana is *free from illness*, free from pain. He has a good digestion. His body is neither too cold nor too warm.<sup>327</sup> His health surpasses that of any other human.

King Mahā Sudassana, Ānanda, is endowed with this third splendid quality. **[178]**

**1.21** (4) Furthermore, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana is *dear and charming*<sup>328</sup> to the brahmin house-lords.<sup>329</sup>

Ānanda, just as a father is dear to his children, even so, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana is dear and charming to the brahmin house-lords.

1.21.2 And, Ānanda, brahmin house-lords are dear and charming to king Mahā Sudassana.

Ānanda, just as children are dear and charming to their father, even so, Ānanda, are brahmin house-lords dear and charming to king Mahā Sudassana.

1.21.3 Once upon a time, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana is driving in a pleasure park with his four-fold army. Then, Ānanda, brahmin house-lords go to him and speak thus,

‘Sire, please drive slowly that we may see you longer.’

<sup>323</sup> *Paṇḍito viyatto medhāvī paṭibalo rājānaṃ mahā, sudassanaṃ upayāpetabbaṃ upayāpetuṃ, apayāpetabbaṃ apayāpetuṃ, ṭhapetabbaṃ ṭhapetuṃ.*

<sup>324</sup> On the commander jewel, see Intro (3.7).

<sup>325</sup> The 4 qualities as at **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129.42-45/3:176 f), SD 2.22.

<sup>326</sup> “Exceedingly handsome...etc.” *abhirūpā dassanīyā pāsādikā paramāya vanṇa, pokkharatāya samannāgatā*, a stock phrase on perfect beauty, also spoken of the king’s woman jewel [§1.15.1]; also at D 1:114; S 2:279; PvA 46.

<sup>327</sup> *App’ābādho ahoṣi appātāṅko sama, vepākiniyā gahaṇiyā samannāgato nātisūtāya nāccuṅhāya*: **D 17.1.20/2**:-177 (of a wheel-turner), **30.2.8.2/3**:166 (×2) (of a wheel-turner); **M 82.31/2**:67 (of Raṭṭha, pāla), **85.57/2**:95 (in a parable); the rest, all concerning meditators: **A 5.53.2/3**:65, **54.9/3**:66, **78.3/3**:103, **135.3/3**:153 f (×2), **10.11.2/5**:15. The above line with “surpassing any other human” (*ativiya aññehi manussehi*), ie the whole stock: M 3:176 (of a wheel-turner).

<sup>328</sup> “Dear and charming,” *piyo ahoṣi manāpo*, which is stock: D 2:19, 20, 178 (×3), 3:167 f; M 3:176 (×3); J 2:155, 4:132; *piyo manāpo* D 2:236 (×2), 355; M 2:56, 57, 58 (×2), 59 (×2), 60, 62, 106 (×2), 107, 355, 3:168 (×2); S 2:98; U 14 (×2); *piyo hoti manāpo* D 3:167 f; M 3:176 (×3); A 3:39-270 (39 hits), 4:1, 2 (×3), 32, 155, 156 (×3), 280, 361; *piyo ca hoti manāpo* ca A 4:1, 2 (×3), 32, 65, 155, 156 (×3), 280, 361, 5:131; Nc:Be 239; *piyo ca assaṃ manāpo ca* M 1:33; *piyo bhāvissāmi manāpo bhāvissāmi* Nm 1:232, 2:257, 385. The expression here means that Mahā Sudassana has great charisma, and the foll para suggests that the populace look up to him as a father-figure.

<sup>329</sup> *Brāhmaṇa, gahapatika*, also spelt *brāhmaṇa, gahapati*, which is invariably a collective term, never an individual, ie, the landed community of the brahmin villages (*brāhmaṇa, gāma*) or fiefs (*brahma, deya*) as a whole. This classification is based on land-ownership (ie their economic function), who nonetheless still identified with the larger priestly class. As such, individually, they (such as Kūṭa, danta, Caṅkī, etc) are still referred to simply as *brāhmaṇa*. See Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, Oxford Univ Press, 1987:72 f.

And so, Ānanda, he tells his charioteer,  
 ‘Charioteer, drive slowly that I may see the brahmin houselords longer.’  
 King Mahā Sudassana, Ānanda, is endowed with this fourth splendid quality.  
 1.21.4 These, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana is endowed with these four splendid qualities.

### The lotus lakes

**1.22** Then, Ānanda, this occurs to king Mahā Sudassana:

‘What now if I were to make lotus lakes in the spaces between these palms<sup>330</sup> at every hundred bow-lengths?’

1.22.2 Then, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana makes lotus lakes in the spaces between the palms at every hundred bow-lengths.

1.22.3 And these lotus lakes, Ānanda, are lined with brick of four kinds—some are made of gold, some of silver, some of beryl, some of crystal.

1.22.4 Now, Ānanda, to each of these lotus lakes are added four stairways of four kinds.

Each golden stairway has (a balustrade of) golden [179] posts with silver hand-rails and head-posts [newels].<sup>331</sup>

Each silver stairway has (a balustrade of) silver posts with gold hand-rails and head-posts.

Each beryl stairway has (a balustrade of) beryl posts with crystal hand-rails and head-posts.

Each crystal stairway has (a balustrade of) crystal posts with beryl hand-rails and head-posts.

1.22.5 RAILINGS AROUND THE LOTUS LAKE. Now, Ānanda, the lotus lakes are surrounded by two railings, one of gold, one of silver.

The golden railing has golden posts, with silver hand-rails and head-posts.

The silver railing has silver posts, with golden hand-rails and head-posts.

**1.23** LOTUSSES IN THE LAKES. Then, Ānanda, this occurs to king Mahā Sudassana:

‘What now if I were to grow blue lotuses, or white lotuses, or water lilies, or red lotuses, in these lakes for all seasons, open to everyone who wants to make garlands of them.’<sup>332</sup>

1.23.2 Then, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana grows blue lotuses, or white lotuses, or water lilies, and red lotuses, in those lakes for all seasons, open to everyone who wants to make garlands of them.

1.23.3 BATH ATTENDANTS AT THE LAKES. Then, Ānanda, this occurs to king Mahā Sudassana:

‘What now if I were to station bath-attendants at the edge of these lotus lakes, so that people who come could be bathed?’

Then, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana stations bath-attendants at the edge of these lotus lakes, so that people who come could be bathed.

1.23.4 CHARITY AT THE LAKES. Then, Ānanda, this occurs to king Mahā Sudassana:

‘What now if I were to arrange giving to be made at the edge of these lotus lakes, such as the giving of food to those in need of food, drinks to those in need of drink, clothings to those in need of clothing,

<sup>330</sup> In the palms surrounding the city [§§1.6.1]; see below, for palms at the entrance at the entrances to the pinnacled halls [§1.26.8], and palm grove at the entrance of the pinnacled hall of great dispelling [§1.27]. It is as if the sections on the 7 jewels [§§1.7.1-1.21.4] have been abruptly interpolated just before §1.22.1.

<sup>331</sup> *Sovaṇṇa, mayassa sopānassa sovaṇṇa, mayā thambhā ahesuṃ, rūpiya, mayā sūciyo ca unḥisañ ca*. CPD def *unḥisa* as “the coping of a stone (imaginary gold etc) railing; also used for the upper (outer) curb of a bathing lake (above the steps leading down to the water)” (CPD). More like, I think, *unḥisa*, means a headpost with a capital or “figurehead” (Rhys Davids, D:RD 2:210 n1). These are often seen in the stairways of ancient Indian temples. Some of them look like gargoyles, such as the stone *makara* (sea-monster), preserved in the Melaka museum and the National Museum, KL, Malaysia. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makara\\_\(Hindu\\_mythology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makara_(Hindu_mythology)). On the *newel*, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newel>

<sup>332</sup> *Yan nūnāhaṃ imāsu pokkharāṇīsu eva, rūpaṃ mālaṃ ropāpeyyaṃ uppalaṃ padumaṃ kumudaṃ puṇḍarīkaṃ sabbōtukāṃ sabba, janassa anāvāṭaṇ’ti*. *Uppala* (Skt *utpala*), *paduma* (Skt *padma*), *kumuda* and *puṇḍarīka* respectively.



vehicles to those in need of vehicle, beds for those in need of beds, women for those in need of wives, silver for those in need of silver, gold for those in need of gold?<sup>333</sup> [180]

1.23.5 Then, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana arranges giving to be made at the edge of these lotus lakes, such as the giving of food to those in need of food, drinks to those in need of drink, clothings to those in need of clothing, vehicles to those in need of vehicle, beds for those in need of beds, women for those in need of wives, silver for those in need of silver, gold for those in need of gold.<sup>334</sup>

### Mahā Sudassana rejects gifts of wealth

**1.24 MAHĀ SUDASSANA DECLINES THE GIFT.** Then, Ānanda, the brahmin houselords, bringing with them abundant wealth, go up to king Mahā Sudassana and say this:

‘Your majesty, this abundant wealth, brought here, is dedicated to your majesty. May your majesty please accept it!’

1.24.2 ‘Enough, sirs, my wealth, too, is abundant obtained through just taxes. Let it be yours, take more from here!’<sup>335</sup>

1.24.3 Thus refused by the king Mahā Sudassana, they retire to one side and consult one another, thus:

‘Indeed, it is not proper for us to bring all this wealth back again to our houses. King Mahā Sudassana offers a great sacrifice.

What now if we were to build a dwelling for king Mahā Sudassana.’

**1.24.4 THE BRAHMIN HOUSELORDS DONATE A DWELLING.** So they approach king Mahā Sudassana and say this:

‘Your majesty, we will build a dwelling for you.’

King Mahā Sudassana, Ānanda, consents by his silence.<sup>336</sup>

### Sakra sends Vissa,kamma to Mahā Sudassana

**1.25** Then, Ānanda, Sakra the leader of the gods, having read king Mahā Sudassana’ mind with his own, addresses the devaputra Vissa,kamma:

‘Come now, dear Vissa,kamma, build a dwelling called the Dharma palace.’<sup>337</sup>

1.25.2 ‘Yes, reverend sir,’ replies the devaputra Vissa,kamma, Ānanda, to [181] Sakra, the leader of the gods, and just as a strong man might stretch his arm out or bend it back, he disappears from the world of the Thirty-three and appears before king Mahā Sudassana.

1.25.3 Then, Ānanda, the devaputra Vissa,kamma says this to king Mahā Sudassana,

‘Your majesty, I will build for you a dwelling named the Dharma palace.’

King Mahā Sudassana, Ānanda, consents by his silence.

### The Dharma palace

**1.26 THE SIZE OF THE DHARMA PALACE.**<sup>338</sup> The Dharma palace, Ānanda, is one league long on the east and the west sides, and half a league long on the north and the south sides.<sup>339</sup>

<sup>333</sup> *Hiraññam hiraññatthikassa, suvaṇṇam suvaṇṇatthikassa*, alt tr, “money for those in need of money, gold for those in need of gold.”

<sup>334</sup> **Mahā Sudassana Cariya** (C 1.4) details his giving, saying that he gives three times a day (C 1.4/28-36/3 f).

<sup>335</sup> *Tañ ca vo hotu, ito ca bhīyyo harathā ti.*

<sup>336</sup> This episode has a parallel in **Kūta,daṇṭa S** (D 5) in connection with another ancient king, Mahā Vijita. However, instead of only “brahmin houselords,” there the generous subjects are the four upper social classes, viz, the kshatriya vassals (*khattiya anuyutta*), the members of the royal court (*amacca pārisajja*), the brahmins of the great halls (*brāhmaṇa mahā,sāla*), and the houselords of means (*gaha,pati necayika*), and instead of building a house (*nivesana*), as in Mahā Sudassana’s case, they offer a bloodless sacrifice just as king Vijita has done (D 5.19a-21a/-1:142 f), SD 22.8.

<sup>337</sup> On the name, see §1.26.1 header n.

<sup>338</sup> *Dhamma pāsāda*, alt tr, “the palace of the good Dharma.” Cf **Sudhammā Sabhā**, the assembly hall of the gods of Tāvataṃsa, said to have arisen on account of the merit of Sudhammā, one of Sakra’s four wives. It is 900 leagues

1.26.2 THE GROUND FLOOR. The ground floor, Ānanda, of the Dharma palace, the height of three persons,<sup>340</sup> is built of four kinds of bricks—some are made of gold, some of silver, some of beryl, some of crystal.

1.26.3 PILLARS. The Dharma palace, Ānanda, has 84,000 pillars, of four kinds—some pillars are made of gold, some of silver, some of beryl, some of crystal.

1.26.4 BOARDS. The Dharma palace, Ānanda, is spread out with boards [seats]<sup>341</sup> of four kinds — some are gold, some silver, some beryl, some crystal.

1.26.5 STAIRWAYS. The Dharma palace, Ānanda, is spread out with 24 stairways of four kinds—some are gold, some silver, some beryl, some crystal.

The golden stairways have (a balustrade of) golden posts with silver hand-rails and head-posts [new-els].<sup>342</sup>

The silver stairways have (a balustrade of) silver posts with gold hand-rails and head-posts.

The beryl stairways [182] have (a balustrade of) beryl posts with crystal hand-rails and head-posts.

The crystal stairways have (a balustrade of) crystal posts with beryl hand-rails and head-posts.

1.26.6 PINNACLED HALLS. The Dharma palace, Ānanda, has 84,000 pinnacled halls<sup>343</sup> of four kinds —some are gold, some silver, some beryl, some crystal.

1.26.7 COUCHES. The golden pinnacled hall is spread out with silver couches, the silver pinnacled hall is spread out with golden couches, the beryl pinnacled hall is spread out with ivory couches, the crystal pinnacled hall is spread out with hardwood couches.

1.26.8 PALM TREES. At the entrance to the golden pinnacled hall, there stand silver palms with silver trunks and golden leaves and fruits.<sup>344</sup>

At the entrance to the silver pinnacled hall, there stand golden palms with golden trunks and silver leaves and fruits.

At the entrance to the beryl pinnacled hall, there stand crystal palms with crystal trunks and beryl leaves and fruits.

At the entrance to the crystal pinnacled hall, there stand beryl palms with beryl trunks and crystal leaves and fruits.

1.27 THE PALM GROVE. Then, Ānanda, this occurs to king Mahā Sudassana:

‘What now if I were to create at the entrance **to the pinnacled hall of great dispelling**,<sup>345</sup> a palm grove, all made of gold, where I can sit for the day-residence?’<sup>346</sup>

Then, Ānanda, he creates at the entrance to the pinnacled hall of great dispelling, a palm grove, all made of gold, where he sits for the day-residence.

in extent (DhA 1:269-271, 274 f; J 1:201 f; ApA 245). There the devas meet for all their important occasions, such as, the eighth day of each month and Dharma teachings (D 2:268; M 2:79; S 1:221; J 6:97, 126; Tha 1198). All the buddhas are said to teach the Abhidhamma in the Sudhammā Hall (BA 265). Every deva-world has a Sudhammā Hall (ThaA 3:174 f). This title is often used as the model of a fine hall. On the league, see Intro 3.1.1 n.

<sup>339</sup> The Dharma palace’s dimension is the same as that of the Dharma lotus lake [§1.31.1].

<sup>340</sup> *Dhammassa ānanda pāsādassa ti,porisaṃ uccattena* [Ce Ee; Be Se *uccatarena*] *vattu citāṃ ahoṣi*. This prob refers to a podium, crepidoma, or stereobate, ie, a solid mass of masonry above ground level serving as the foundation of a building, esp the platform forming the floor and substructure of a classical temple, See Francis D K Ching, *A Visual Dictionary of Architecture*, NY: John Wiley, 1995:250.

<sup>341</sup> “Spread out with... etc,” *phalakehi santhato ahoṣi*. Here *phalaka*, “a flat piece of wood, a slab, board, plank” (J 1:451, 5:155, 6:281). These planks (without cushions or mats on them) clearly serve as seats for meditators.

<sup>342</sup> *Sovaṇṇa,mayassa sopānassa sovaṇṇa,mayā thambhā ahesuṃ, rūpiya,mayā sūciyo ca uṇḥisaṃ ca*: as at §1.22.4.

<sup>343</sup> “Pinnacled chambers,” *kūṭ’āgāra*, which here are prob meditation cells on the upper floor.

<sup>344</sup> On this section [§1.26.7], cf §1.6.1-2.

<sup>345</sup> “The pinnacled hall of great dispelling,” *mahā,v[i]yūha kūṭ’āgāra*, which clearly refers to a place for the ridding of the mental hindrances, ie, for the attaining of dhyana. See Intro (4.1.2).

<sup>346</sup> “Day-residence,” *divā,vihāra*, ie a cool, shady spot, usu under a tree away from the noon heat, spent in meditation.

**1.28** THE RAILINGS AROUND THE DHARMA PALACE. Now, Ānanda, the Dharma palace is surrounded by two railings, [183] one of gold, one of silver.

The golden railing has golden posts, with silver hand-rails and head-posts.

The silver railing has silver posts, with golden hand-rails and head-posts

**1.29** NETWORK OF LITTLE BELLS. Ānanda, the Dharma palace is encircled by two networks of little bells:<sup>347</sup> one network is made of gold, one network of silver.

The golden network has little bells of silver. The silver network has little bells of gold.

1.29.2 And the sound of these networks of little bells, Ānanda, when stirred by the wind, is lovely, delightful, pleasant, intoxicating.

Ānanda, just as the sound of the five kinds of musical instruments, well-tuned, well played, very skillfully harmonized together is lovely, delightful, pleasant, intoxicating,

even so, too, Ānanda, is the sound of networks of little bells, when stirred by the wind, is lovely, delightful, pleasant, intoxicating.

1.29.3 And at that time, too, Ānanda, in the royal city of Kusā, vātī, revellers, drinkers and the thirsty dance around to the sound of those networks of little bells stirred by the wind.<sup>348</sup>

**1.30** THE DAZZLING PALACE. Now, Ānanda, when the Dharma palace is completed, it is difficult to look at, dazzling to the eyes.<sup>349</sup>

Ānanda, just as in the last month of the rains, in autumn, when the sky is clear of thunder-clouds and rain, the sun ascending the skies, [184] is difficult to look at, dazzling to the eyes,

even so, Ānanda, the Dharma palace is difficult to look at, dazzling to the eyes.

**1.31** THE DHARMA LOTUS LAKE. Then, Ānanda, it occurs to king Mahā Sudassana:

‘What now, if I were to build in front of the Dharma palace a lotus lake named Dharma.

Then, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana builds in front of the Dharma palace a lotus lake named Dharma.

1.31.2 The Dharma lotus lake, Ānanda, is one league long on the east and west sides, and half a league long on the north and south sides.<sup>350</sup>

1.31.3 THE 24 STAIRWAYS. The Dharma lotus lake, Ānanda, has 24 stairways of four kinds—some are gold, some silver, some beryl, some crystal.

The golden stairways have (a balustrade of) golden posts with silver hand-rails and head-posts [new-els].<sup>351</sup>

The silver stairways have (a balustrade of) silver posts with gold hand-rails and head-posts.

The beryl stairways have (a balustrade of) beryl posts with crystal hand-rails and head-posts.

The crystal stairways have (a balustrade of) crystal posts with beryl hand-rails and head-posts.

1.31.4 RAILINGS AROUND THE LAKE. The Dharma lotus lake, Ānanda, is surrounded by two railings—one made of gold, one of silver.

The golden railing has golden posts, with silver hand-rails and head-posts.

The silver railing has silver posts, with golden hand-rails and head-posts.

**1.32** THE PALM TREES AROUND THE LAKE. Ānanda, the Dharma lotus lake is encircled by seven rows of palm trees.

One row of palm trees is made of gold, one of silver, one of beryl, one of crystal, one of ruby, one of sapphire; one of all the jewels.<sup>352</sup>

<sup>347</sup> D 2:183; J 2:32; DhA 1:274 (in Tāvatiṃsa).

<sup>348</sup> *Ye kho pan’ānanda, tena samayena kusāvatiyā rāja, dhāniyā dhuttā ahesuṃ soṇḍā pipāsā, te tesam kiṅkiṅka, -jālānaṃ vāteritānaṃ saddena paricāresuṃ.* Here, “the thirsty” (*pipāsā*) is figurative, ie, incl the loose and lustful.

<sup>349</sup> *Niṭṭhito kho pan’ānanda, dhammo pāsādo duddikkho ahosi musati cakkhūni.* On *musati cakkhūni*, cf *musatīva nayanam* (“dazzling to the eye,” Vv 35.3; VvA 161).

<sup>350</sup> The Dharma lotus lake’s dimension is the same as that of the Dharma palace [§1.26.1].

<sup>351</sup> *Sovaṇṇa, mayassa sopānassa sovaṇṇa, mayā thambhā ahesuṃ, rūpiya, mayā sūciyo ca unḥisaṅ ca:* as at §1.22.4.

<sup>352</sup> *Ekā tāla, panti sovaṇṇa, mayā, ekā rūpiya, mayā, ekā veluriya, mayā, ekā phalika, mayā, ekā lohitaṅka, mayā, ekā masāra, galla, mayā, ekā sabba, ratana, mayā.* The tr folls the Pali; alternatively, it can be read as “One row has palm

1.32.2	The gold palm has	a golden trunk, [185]	with silver leaves and fruits. <sup>353</sup>
	The silver palm has	a silver trunk,	with golden leaves and fruits.
	The beryl palm has	a beryl trunk,	with crystal leaves and fruits.
	The crystal palm has	a crystal trunk,	with beryl leaves and fruits.
	The ruby palm has	a ruby trunk,	with sapphire leaves and fruits.
	The sapphire palm has	a ruby trunk,	with ruby leaves and fruits.
	The all-jewelled palm has	an all-jewelled trunk,	with all-jewelled leaves and fruits.

1.32.3 THE PALM TREES' SOUND. And the sound of those palm trees, Ānanda, when stirred by the wind, is lovely, delightful, pleasant, intoxicating.

Ānanda, just as the sound of the five kinds of musical instruments, well-tuned, well played, very skillfully harmonized together is lovely, delightful, pleasant, intoxicating,

even so, too, Ānanda, is the sound of those palm trees, when stirred by the wind, is lovely, delightful, pleasant, intoxicating.

1.32.4 And at that time, too, Ānanda, in the royal city of Kusā,vātī, revellers, drinkers and the thirsty dance around to the sound of those palm trees stirred by the wind.<sup>354</sup>

**1.33 MAHĀ SUDASSANA'S CHARITY.** Ānanda, when both the Dharma palace and the Dharma lotus lake are completed, king Mahā Sudassana provide the recluses and those revered as recluses, and the brahmins and those revered as brahmins, of that time, with whatever they want. Having done that, he goes up into the Dharma palace.

[Paṭhama,bhānavāram.<sup>355</sup> The first recitation (ends here)]

**2 KARMIC ROOTS.** Then, Ānanda, this occurs to king Mahā Sudassana:

‘Now, of what karmic fruit, of what karmic result that I am now of such great power, of such great might?’ [186]

Then, Ānanda, this occurs to king Mahā Sudassana:

‘It is of three karmic fruits, three karmic results, that I am now of such great power, of such great might, that is to say,

of charity, of self-taming, and of restraint.’<sup>356</sup>

**2.2 THE PINNACLED HALL OF GREAT DISPELLING.** Then, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana approaches the pinnacled hall of great dispelling, and standing at its door, he uttered this udana [these words of up-lift]:

‘Stop, sensual thoughts! Stop, hateful thoughts! Stop, violent thoughts!

Only thus far, sensual thoughts! Only thus far, hateful thoughts! Only thus far, violent thoughts!’<sup>357</sup>

**2.3 MAHĀ SUDASSANA ATTAINS DHYANA.** Then, Ānanda, when king Mahā Sudassana has entered the pinnacled hall of great dispelling, he sits down on **the golden couch**,<sup>358</sup>

trees made of gold...” etc. These descriptions of these 7 rows of palm trees are just like those around Kusā,vātī [§1.6].

<sup>353</sup> The precious stones and metals are as follows: gold (*suvanṇa*), silver (*rūpiya*), beryl (*veḷuriya*), crystal (*phalika*), ruby (*lohitaṅka*), sapphire (*msāra,galla*), and all-jewel (*sabba,ratana*). See §1.4n (*Eko pākāro...*) for details.

<sup>354</sup> *Ye kho pan'ānanda, tena samayena kusāvatiyā rāja,dhāniyā dhuttā ahesuṃ soṇḍā pipāsā, te tāsāṃ tāla,pan-tīnaṃ vāteritānaṃ saddena paricāresuṃ.* Here, “the thirsty” (*pipāsā*) is figurative, ie, incl the loose and lustful.

<sup>355</sup> A *bhānavāra* comprises 8,000 syllables (*akkhara*), which is 250 verses (*gāthā*). A *gāthā* traditionally has 32 syllables, ie, 8 syllables a line (*pāda*) (O von Hinüber, JPTS 21, 1995:131).

<sup>356</sup> *Dānassa damassa saṃyamassā*, This set is reminiscent of 3 grounds for merit-making (*puñña,kiriya,vatthu*), viz, the grounds for merit-making through giving (*dāna,maya puñña,kiriya,vatthu*), through moral virtue (*sīla,maya puñña,kiriya,vatthu*), and through mental cultivation (*bhāvanā,maya puñña,kiriya,vatthu*). See Intro (4.1).

<sup>357</sup> *Tiṭṭha, kāma,vitakka, tiṭṭha, vyāpāda,vitakka, tiṭṭha, vihiṃsā,vitakka. Ettāvata, kāma,vitakka, ettāvata, vyāpāda,vitakka, ettāvata, vihiṃsā,vitakkā ti.* These 3 negative thoughts constitute “wrong intention” (*micchā,saṅkappa*): see **Mahā Cattārīsaka S** (M 117.11/3:72), SD 6.10. Mahā Sudassana is here applying right intention to guard his meditation [§2.8]. On the context of right intention in the 3 trainings, see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6 (3.2.1).



quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states, he attains and dwells in the **first dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, and with zest and happiness born of solitude.<sup>359</sup>

With the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, he attains and dwells in the **second dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, with zest and happiness born of concentration.<sup>360</sup>

With the fading away of zest, he dwells equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experiences happiness with the body. He attains and dwells in the **third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’

With the abandoning of joy and pain—and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure—he attains and dwells in the **fourth dhyana**, that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.

**2.4 THE 4 IMMEASURABLES.** Then, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana leaves the pinnacled hall of great dispelling and enters the golden pinnacled hall, and having sat down on the **silver couch**,<sup>361</sup>

(1) he dwells pervading one quarter with a mind of lovingkindness;

so, too, the second quarter; so, too, the third quarter; so, too, the fourth quarter.

Thus above, below, across, everywhere and to everyone as well as to himself.

He dwells pervading the whole world with *lovingkindness*

that is vast, grown great [exalted],<sup>362</sup> immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.<sup>363</sup>

(2) He dwells pervading one quarter with a heart of compassion;

so, too, the second quarter; so, too, the third quarter; so, too, the fourth quarter.

Thus above, below, across, everywhere and to everyone as well as to himself.

He dwells pervading the whole world with *compassion*

that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

(3) He dwells pervading one quarter with a heart of appreciative joy;

so, too, the second quarter; so, too, the third quarter; so, too, the fourth quarter.

<sup>358</sup> *Atha kho, ānanda, rājā mahā, sudassano mahā, viyūhaṃ kūṭ’āgāraṃ pavisitvā sovaṇṇa, maye pallaṅke nisinno.* Here, it is clear that he sits down in a meditation posture. Here (and below), “couches,” *pallaṅka* (n), clearly refers to a kind of seat, “a couch, a couch, a sofa, or a divan” (D 1:7; S 1:95; J 1:268, 4:396, 5:161; Vv 31.1; Pv 2.12.7, 3:3.2; DhA 1:19; PvA 189, 219). As **adj.**, *pallaṅkaṃ* eg ~ *ābhujati*, “he sits cross-legged (upon the hams)” (D 1:71; M 1:56; A 3:320; J 1:17, 71; Pm 1:176; Pug 68; Miln 289; DhA 2:201) or **instr** (functioning as an adv), *pallaṅkena*, “cross-legged” (S 1:124, 144), which is implied at §§2.3 & 2.4(1). Here, the couch seems to be very elaborate, but is nevertheless firm and level enough to provide comfort and stability for a long sitting. See **Venāga, pura S** (A 3.63), where the Buddha calls the dhyanas his “heavenly high and great couch” (*dibba uccā, sayana. mahā, sayana*) (A 3.-63.5/1:182), SD 21.1; see §2.4 n on “the silver couch,” below.

<sup>359</sup> “Born of solitude,” *viveka, ja*; ie it is the result of abandoning the hindrances: on the 3 kinds of solitude, see **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (1.5). On the omission of “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) and “concentration” (*samādhi*) here, see **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5.

<sup>360</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya, tuṅhī, bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained application (thinking and discursion, *vitakka, vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur. (S 2:273); cf. S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī, saṅkhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech. In **Ariya, pariyesanā S** (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate). See **Dutiya Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.2/4:263 f), SD 24.12.

<sup>361</sup> See **Venāga, pura S** (A 3.63), where the Buddha calls the divine abodes his “perfect high and great couch” (*brahma uccā, sayana. mahā, sayana*) (A 3.63.65/1:183), SD 21.2; see §2.3 n on “the golden couch,” above.

<sup>362</sup> The mind “grown great” (*maha-g, gatā*) or exalted perception refers to the mind in dhyana, ie in the form sphere (*rūpāvacara*). See **Catuttha Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.4), SD 24.14 (4).

<sup>363</sup> The recurrence of these last two phrases—“without hate, without ill will”—attests to the fact that lovingkindness is the basis for all the other three abodes, ie, they are actually a refinement of lovingkindness applied on deeper and broader levels.

Thus above, below, across, everywhere and to everyone as well as to himself.

He dwells pervading the whole world with *appreciative joy*

that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

(4) He dwells pervading one quarter with a heart of equanimity; [187]

so, too, the second quarter; so, too, the third quarter; so, too, the fourth quarter.

Thus above, below, across, everywhere and to everyone as well as to himself.

He dwells pervading the whole world with *equanimity*

that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

2.5 THE REFRAIN ON THE 84,000 (1).<sup>364</sup> Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana has<sup>365</sup>

84,000 <u>cities</u> ,	the chief of which is the royal city of Kusā, vātī;
84,000 <u>palaces</u> ,	the chief of which is the Dharma palace;
84,000 <u>pinnacled halls</u> ,	the chief of which is the pinnacled halls of great dispelling;
84,000 <u>couches</u> ,	made of gold, and silver, and ivory, and hardwood, spread over with long-furred rugs, and coverlets embroidered with long-furred rugs, embroidered white woollen sheets, choice rugs of Kadālī deer hide, spreads with red canopies, and crimson double rests [crimson pillows and bolsters] for the head and feet; <sup>366</sup>
84,000 <u>elephants</u> ,	with gold trappings, and gilded flags, and covered with a golden netting <sup>367</sup> —the chief of which is the king of elephants, named Uposatha [Sabbath]; [§2.12.1]
84,000 <u>horses</u> ,	with gold trappings, and gilded flags, and covered with a golden netting—the chief of which is the king of horses, named Valāhaka [Thunder-cloud]; [§1.13]
84,000 <u>chariots</u> ,	with coverings of lion hide, of tiger hide, of leopard hide, with saffron-coloured blankets, with gold trappings, with golden banners, each covered with a golden net—the chief of which is the chariot Veja, yanta [the victory machine]; <sup>368</sup>
84,000 <u>jewels</u> ,	the chief of which is the gem jewel; [§1.14]
84,000 <u>women</u> ,	the chief of whom is queen Subhaddā; [§1.15] [188]
84,000 <u>houselords</u> ,	the chief of whom is the steward jewel; [§1.16]
84,000 loyal <sup>369</sup> <u>nobles</u> ,	the chief of whom is commander jewel; [§1.17]

<sup>364</sup> This refrain is repeated 5 more times with minor variations [§§2.10b, 2.11c, 2.12b, 2.14b, 2.15]. See n in the concluding cycle [§2.15].

<sup>365</sup> Mahā Sudassana's possessions are listed here as 14 sets of 84,000 items. The Skt version however speaks of only 6 sets (Matsumura 1988:3,9-11). Most of the trappings and cloths mentioned here are found in the Moralities, eg **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1.15/1:1:7), SD 25.2 & SD 25.1 (3).

<sup>366</sup> This passage is part of a stock in **Mahā Sīha, nāda S** parable (M 12.41/1:76), SD 2.24 & **Velāma S** (A 9.20.4/-4:393 f), SD 16.6. The phrase *ubhato, lohita kūpadhāno*, alt tr “crimson rests at both ends (of the couch).” Cf **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1.15/1:7) & **Venāga S** (A 3.63.3b/1:181), SD 21.1, for a more detailed list.

<sup>367</sup> *Hema, jāla, paṭicchanna*; also covered with little bells (*kinḍiṇi*) (**Suvaṇṇa Vv**, Vv 7.4/113); maidens' hair covering (**Bhūri, datta J**, J 543/6:188).

<sup>368</sup> This passage is part of a stock in **Mahā Sīha, nāda S** parable (M 12.41/1:76), SD 2.24 & **Velāma S** (A 9.20.4/-4:393), SD 16.6. See **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1.15/1:7) & **Venāga S** (A 3.63.3b/1:181), SD 21.1, for a more detailed list. **Vejayanta** is prob resolved as *vijaya* (“victory”) + *yanta* (“machinery, instrument, device”), by way of a haplology (loss of syllable *ya*): as Mahā Sudassana's chariot, see DA 2:482. It is also the name of Sakra's chariot, which is 150 leagues long, drawn by 1000 horses, with Mātali as charioteer; used both in battle against the asuras (eg S 1:224 f) and to bring humans to the deva world (cf M 2:79 f; S 1:211, 234-236): see **Sudhā, bhojana J** (J 535/5:408 f); see also MA 1:225; SA 2:325; J 1:202, 6:103; VvA 141. It is better known as the name of Sakra's palace, eg in **Cūla Taṇhā, saṅkhaya S** (M 37.8-9/1:253 f); see also DA 2:481, 558, 716; SA 2:303; DhA 1:273; J 1:203; ThaA 3:173; ApA 244; cf M 1:338.

<sup>369</sup> *Anuyanta* (adj pl), from *anu-yāti*, “he follows along.”

84,000 milch cows with jute tethers and bronze milking pails;<sup>370</sup>  
 84,000 myriads of garments of fine linen, fine cotton, fine silk, and fine wool;  
 84,000 dishes for the serving of rice.<sup>371</sup>

**2.6 THE ROYAL ELEPHANTS**, Now at that time, Ānanda, the 84,000 elephants come every evening and every morning to serve king Mahā Sudassana. Then, Ananda, this occurs to king Mahā Sudassana:

‘The 84,000 elephants come every evening and every morning to serve me. What now, if I were to let the elephants come in two groups, each of 42,000, every alternate hundred years?’

2.6.2 So, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana addresses the commander jewel,

‘Dear commander jewel, the 84,000 elephants come every evening and every morning to serve me. Dear commander jewel, let them come in two groups, [189] each of 42,000, every alternate hundred years.’

2.6.3 ‘Yes, your majesty,’ the commander jewel replies to king Mahā Sudassana.

From then on, Ānanda, the 84,000 elephants come in two groups, each of 42,000, every alternate hundred years, to serve king Mahā Sudassana.’

### Queen Subhaddā and entourage visit Mahā Sudassana

**2.7 QUEEN SUBHADDĀ MISSES THE KING.** Now, Ānanda, after many years, many hundreds, many hundreds of thousands of years, it occurs to queen Subhaddā:

‘I have not seen king Mahā Sudassana for a long time. What now if I were to go and see him?’

Then, Ānanda, queen Subhaddā addresses the women of the harem:

‘Come now, wash your hair! Dress yourselves in fresh clothes! We have not seen king Mahā Sudassana for a long time. Let us go and see king Mahā Sudassana.’

‘Yes, madam,’ Ānanda, the harem women replies to queen Subhaddā.

They wash their hair, dress themselves in fresh clothes, and approach queen Subhaddā.

Then, Ānanda, queen Subhaddā addresses the commander jewel:

‘Dear commander jewel, get the fourfold army ready. We have not seen king Mahā Sudassana for a long time. We are going to see king Mahā Sudassana.’

‘Yes, my queen,’ Ānanda, the commander jewel replies to queen Subhaddā. He gets ready the fourfold army, and then announces to queen Subhaddā:

‘The fourfold army is ready, my queen. Please do as you think fit.’<sup>372</sup> [190]

**2.8 QUEEN SUBHADDĀ AND THE WOMEN AT THE DHARMA PALACE.** Then, Ānanda, queen Subhaddā, accompanied by the fourfold army, together with the harem women, approach the Dharma palace. There, she goes up the Dharma palace, approaches the pinnacled hall of great dispelling, and there she stands leaning against the door-post.<sup>373</sup>

Then, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana, hearing their sound, thinks:

‘What’s that? It sounds like a great crowd.’

When he goes out of the pinnacled hall of the great dispelling, he sees queen Subhaddā standing, leaning against the door-post. Seeing queen Subhaddā, he says:

<sup>370</sup> *Catur-āsīti dhenu, sahasāni ahesuṃ duha, sandanāni kaṃsūpadhāraṇāni.*

<sup>371</sup> *Catur-āsīti thālipāka, sahasāni ahesuṃ sāyam pātāṃ bhattābhīhāro abhihariyittha. Thāli, pāka = thali* (“earthen pot, large dish”) + *pāka* (“cooked”): here prob simply means “dish” (food-serving) or perhaps “pots of food” (V 3:15; D 1:97 :: DA 1:267; S 2:242, 5:384; A 1:166; J 1:186; Miln 249).

<sup>372</sup> *Yassa dāni kālaṃ maññasī ti*, lit “for this now, think you the time.”

<sup>373</sup> “She stands, leaning against the door-post,” *dvāra, bāhaṃ ālambitvā aṭṭhāsī. Bāhā*, only as (1) suffix in *ālabana* ~ “(lit, ‘handing down,’) a post to hold on to, a balustrade, a support” (V 2:120, 152); (2) *dvāra*~ “doorpost” (D 2:190; *dvāra, bāhāsu*, Pv 14/1.5.1/3, ref to pretas). Possibly, this is the central vertical post of the door commonly found, eg, on Thai temple doors. Wry humour is evident here: the queen depicted as a preta waiting at the door. This also reminds us of **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16) account of how Ānanda weeps, leaning against the lodging’s door-post, on realizing that he is still only a learner (a streamwinner) and that the Buddha “who is so kind to me” will soon pass away (D 16.5.13/2; 143), SD 9.

‘Stay right there, my queen, please do not enter!’<sup>374</sup>

**2.9** THE GOLDEN COUCH IS PLACED IN THE PALM GROVE. Then, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana addresses a certain man [worker]:

‘Come, my good man, take the golden couch out of the hall of great dispelling and lay it out in the grove of palm trees, all made of gold.’

‘Yes, your majesty,’ the man replies to king Mahā Sudassana, takes the golden couch out of the hall of great dispelling and lays it out in the grove of palm trees, all made of gold.

Then, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana lays himself down on his right side, in a lion’s posture, and places one foot on the other, mindful and clearly comprehending.

**2.10** THE KING’S RADIANCE.<sup>375</sup> Then, Ānanda, it occurs to queen Subhaddā:

‘Clear indeed are king Mahā Sudassana’s faculties! Exceedingly pure and clear is his complexion! Surely, king Mahā Sudassana is passing away!’<sup>376</sup>

2.10.2 THE REFRAIN ON THE 84,000 (2). She says this to king Mahā Sudassana:

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 cities,  
the chief of which is the royal city of Kusā,vāṭī.

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!<sup>377</sup> [191]

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 palaces,  
the chief of which is the Dharma palace.

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 pinnacled halls,  
the chief of which is the pinnacled halls of great dispelling.

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 couches,  
made of gold, and silver, and ivory, and hardwood, spread  
over with long-furred rugs, and coverlets embroidered with  
long-furred rugs, embroidered white woollen sheets, choice  
rugs of Kadalī deer hide, spreads with red canopies, and  
crimson double rests [crimson pillows and bolsters] for the  
head and feet.

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 elephants,  
with gold trappings, and gilded flags, and covered with a  
golden netting—the chief of which is the king of elephants,  
named Uposatha [Sabbath].

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 horses,  
with gold trappings, and gilded flags, and covered with a  
golden netting—the chief of which is the king of horses,  
named Valāhaka [Thunder-cloud].

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 chariots,

<sup>374</sup> Here again we see the metaphor of restraint in connection with king Mahā Sudassana’s meditation: cf §2.2.

<sup>375</sup> From here to the end [§§2.10-13] (D 17.2.10-13/2:190-196), summarized (with variations) as **Mahā Sudassana J** (J 95/1:391-393), SD 36.19.

<sup>376</sup> The same is said of the Buddha in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16), which is followed by his transfiguration (D 16.4.37/2:133 f), SD 9. Note that here, it only “occurs” to queen Subhaddā that Mahā Sudassana is passing away. **Mahā Sudassana J** (J 95), however, says that the king *tells* her of his impending death, the queens weeps, and the 84,00 women, too, then weep. The king then silences them, and admonishes them on impermanence, to practise generosity, keep the precepts, and observe the uposatha (J 95.9-18/1:392 f), SD 36.17.

<sup>377</sup> The 2 sentences: *Ettha deva chandam janehi jivite apekkham karohi.*

with coverings of lion hide, of tiger hide, of leopard hide,  
with saffron-coloured blankets, with gold trappings, with  
golden banners, each covered with a golden net—the chief  
of which is the chariot Veja,yanta [the victory machine].

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 jewels,  
the chief of which is the gem jewel.

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 women,  
the chief of whom is queen Subhaddā.

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 houselords,  
the chief of whom is the steward jewel.

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 loyal nobles,  
the chief of whom is commander jewel.

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 milch cows [192]  
with jute tethers and bronze milking pails.

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 myriads of garments  
of fine linen, fine cotton, fine silk, and fine wool.

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 dishes  
for the serving of rice.

Your majesty, direct your desire here!  
Arouse your longing for life!

**2.11 THE KING'S REFLECTION ON IMPERMANENCE.** When this has been said, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana says this to queen Subhaddā:

‘For a long time, my queen, have you conducted yourself towards me in a desirable, pleasant, loving and agreeable manner. But now, in my last moments, you conducted yourself towards me in a undesirable, unpleasant, unloving and disagreeable manner!’

‘How, your majesty, should I conduct myself towards you?’<sup>378</sup>

2.11.2 THE REFRAIN ON THE 84,000 (3). ‘This is how, my queen, you should conduct yourself towards me, saying:

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 cities,  
the chief of which is the royal city of Kusā,vātī.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!<sup>379</sup>

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 palaces,  
the chief of which is the Dharma palace.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life! [193]

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 pinnacled halls,  
the chief of which is the pinnacled halls of great dispelling.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 couches,  
made of gold, and silver, and ivory, and hardwood, spread

<sup>378</sup> Here, the Skt version here adds that the king lowers his eyes so as not to look directly at all the harem women in their finery, so as not to arouse lust in himself. The queen then implores the king not to be so uninterested in them (Matsumura 1988:35,5-37,2 ≠ Waldschmidt 1951:342; Gethin 2006:79 n38). See Intro (4.2.3).

<sup>379</sup> *Ettha deva chandaṃ pajaha jīvite apekkhaṃ mākāsi*. This is in fact the theme of **Nakula S** (A 6.16), ie dying without any longing (A 6.16/3:295-298) & SD 5.2 (2.2) for other related suttas.



over with long-furred rugs, and coverlets embroidered with long-furred rugs, embroidered white woollen sheets, choice rugs of Kadalī deer hide, spreads with red canopies, and crimson double rests [crimson pillows and bolsters] for the head and feet.

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 elephants, with gold trappings, and gilded flags, and covered with a golden netting—the chief of which is the king of elephants, named Uposatha [Sabbath].

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 horses, with gold trappings, and gilded flags, and covered with a golden netting—the chief of which is the king of horses, named Valāhaka [Thunder-cloud].

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 chariots, with coverings of lion hide, of tiger hide, of leopard hide, with saffron-coloured blankets, with gold trappings, with golden banners, each covered with a golden net—the chief of which is the chariot Veja,yanta [the victory machine].

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 jewels, the chief of which is the gem jewel.

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 women, the chief of whom is queen Subhaddā.

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 houselords, the chief of whom is the steward jewel.

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 loyal nobles, the chief of whom is commander jewel.

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 milch cows with jute tethers and bronze milking pails.

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 myriads of garments of fine linen, fine cotton, fine silk, and fine wool.

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 dishes for the serving of rice.

**2.12** When this has been said, Ānanda, queen Subhaddā weeps and sheds tears.

Then, Ānanda, queen Subhaddā wipes away her tears, and says this to king Mahā Sudassana:

‘All that is loving, your majesty, all that is pleasant, would face separation, face division, face alteration.<sup>380</sup> Pass away, your majesty, without longing. For painful it is for those who pass away with longing; blameworthy are those who pass away with longing.<sup>381</sup>

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life! **[194]**

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!’

<sup>380</sup> *Sabbeh’eva, deva, piyehi manāpehi nānā, bhāvo vinā, bhāvo aññathā, bhāvo*: V 2:284; D 2:118, 144, 158, 163, 192, 194; S 5:162; Nm 1:123. This is a stock reflection on impermanence. A similar stock is spoken of the 6 sense-

## 2.12.2 THE REFRAIN ON THE 84,000 (4).

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 cities,  
the chief of which is the royal city of Kusā,vātī.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 palaces,  
the chief of which is the Dharma palace.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 pinnacled halls,  
the chief of which is the pinnacled halls of great dispelling.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 couches,  
made of gold, and silver, and ivory, and hardwood, spread  
over with long-furred rugs, and coverlets embroidered with  
long-furred rugs, embroidered white woollen sheets, choice  
rugs of Kadālī deer hide, spreads with red canopies, and  
crimson double rests [crimson pillows and bolsters] for the  
head and feet.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 elephants,  
with gold trappings, and gilded flags, and covered with a  
golden netting—the chief of which is the king of elephants,  
named Uposatha [Sabbath].

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 horses,  
with gold trappings, and gilded flags, and covered with a  
golden netting—the chief of which is the king of horses,  
named Valāhaka [Thunder-cloud]. [195]

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 chariots,  
with coverings of lion hide, of tiger hide, of leopard hide,  
with saffron-coloured blankets, with gold trappings, with  
golden banners, each covered with a golden net—the chief  
of which is the chariot Veja,yanta [the victory machine].

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 jewels,  
the chief of which is the gem jewel.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 women,  
the chief of whom is queen Subhaddā.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 houselords,  
the chief of whom is the steward jewel.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

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faculties, that they are “impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise” (*aniccam vipariṇāmiṃ aññathā, bhāvī*), eg (Anicca) Cakkhu S (S 25.1.2/3:225), SD 16.7.

<sup>381</sup> For a similar instruction given by Nakula,mātā to Nakula,pitā, see Nakula S (A 6.16/3:295-298), SD 5.2. In the Skt version, however, the king’s instructions are given in general terms without any mention of his imminent death. The king instead returns to the Dharma palace (*dharma,prāsāda*) to practise the four divine abodes. As a result of the king’s sustained meditation (*tad,bahula,vihāri*), we are then generally told, the king is reborn in the Brahmā world (Matsumura 1988:42-45).

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 loyal nobles,  
the chief of whom is commander jewel.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 milch cows  
with jute tethers and bronze milking pails.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 myriads of garments  
of fine linen, fine cotton, fine silk, and fine wool.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

Yours, your majesty, are these 84,000 dishes  
for the serving of rice.

Your majesty, let go of desire here!  
Have no longing for life!

**2.13 MAHĀ SUDASSANA’S REBIRTH IN THE BRAHMA WORLD.** Not very long after that, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana passes away.

2.13.2 Ānanda, just as a houselord or a houselord’s son has eaten a hearty meal and feels joyful<sup>382</sup> on account of it,

even so, Ānanda, is king [196] Mahā Sudassana’s feeling at the moment of dying.

2.13.3 Ānanda, when king Mahā Sudassana dies, he is reborn in the heaven of the brahma world.

2.13.4 MAHĀ SUDASSANA’S CONDUCT.

For 84,000 years, Ānanda, king Mahā Sudassana enjoyed the sportful life as a young prince.<sup>383</sup>

For 84,000 years, he ruled as a viceroy.

For 84,000 years, he reigned as a king.

For 84,000 years, he lived as a layman practising the holy life in the Dharma palace.

Having cultivated the four divine abodes, when the body has broken up after death, he goes to the brahma world.

**2.14 MAHĀ SUDASSANA’S IDENTITY.** Now, Ānanda, you might think thus:

‘At that time, King Mahā Sudassana was someone else, but, Ānanda, you should not see it that way.

At that time, I was king Mahā Sudassana.’

2.14.2 THE REFRAIN ON THE 84,000 (5).

Mine were the 84,000 cities,

the chief of which is the royal city of Kusā,vātī;

Mine were the 84,000 palaces,

the chief of which is the Dharma palace;

Mine were the 84,000 pinnacled halls,

the chief of which is the pinnacled halls of great dispelling;

Mine were the 84,000 couches,

made of gold, and silver, and ivory, and hardwood,  
spread over with long-furred rugs, and coverlets  
embroidered with long-furred rugs, embroidered white  
woollen sheets, choice rugs of Kadalī deer hide, spreads

<sup>382</sup> *Bhatta,sammada*. PED def it only as “drowsiness after a meal,” but *sammada*, also means “greatly exhilarated, happy, glad” (SED). D:RD & D:W foll him have “drowsiness,” as **Gethin** notes, “presumably following the commentary’s gloss: *bhatta-mucchā, bhattu-kilamatha* (DA 634). While this may be correct in certain contexts, the primary meaning of *sammada* [qv SED] in Sanskrit is ‘delight,’ ‘exhilaration,’ and in the present context the emphasis would appear to be on the happiness of King Sudassana’s state of mind at death, rather than on his drowsiness.” (2008: 283 n114).

<sup>383</sup> *Rājā, ānanda, mahā,sudassano catur-āsīti vassa,sahassāni kumāra,kīlam kīli*. This whole section has a parallel in **Makhā,deva S** (M 83), but while king Mahā Sudassana lives as a celibate layman in the palace, king Makhā,deva goes forth into the homeless life (M 83.6/2:76), SD 60.8. M:ÑB renders *kumāra,kīlam kīli* too freely as “played childish games.”

Mine were the 84,000 <u>elephants</u> ,	with red canopies, and crimson double rests [crimson pillows and bolsters] for the head and feet; <sup>384</sup>
Mine were the 84,000 <u>horses</u> ,	with gold trappings, and gilded flags, and covered with a golden netting—the chief of which is the king of elephants, named Uposatha [Sabbath];
Mine were the 84,000 <u>chariots</u> ,	with gold trappings, and gilded flags, and covered with a golden netting—the chief of which is the king of horses, named Valāhaka [Thunder-cloud];
Mine were the 84,000 <u>jewels</u> ,	with coverings of lion hide, [197] of tiger hide, of leopard hide, with saffron-coloured blankets, with gold trappings, with golden banners, each covered with a golden net—the chief of which is the chariot Veja,yanta [the victory machine];
Mine were the 84,000 <u>women</u> ,	the chief of which is the gem jewel;
Mine were the 84,000 <u>houselords</u> ,	the chief of whom is queen Subhaddā;
Mine were the 84,000 loyal <u>nobles</u> ,	the chief of whom is the steward jewel;
Mine were the 84,000 <u>milch cows</u>	the chief of whom is commander jewel;
Mine were the 84,000 myriads of <u>garments</u>	with jute tethers and bronze milking pails; <sup>385</sup>
Mine were the 84,000 <u>dishes</u>	of fine linen, fine cotton, fine silk, and fine wool; for the serving of rice.
<b>2.15</b> THE REFRAIN ON THE 84,000 (6): MAHĀ SUDASSANA’S FRUGAL LIFE. <sup>386</sup>	
But, Ānanda, of those 84,000 <u>cities</u> ,	at that time, I lived in only one of them, namely, the royal city of Kusā,vāṭī. <sup>387</sup>
But, Ānanda, of those 84,000 <u>palaces</u> ,	at that time, I lived in one one of them, namely, the Dharma palace.
But, Ānanda, of those 84,000 <u>pinnacled halls</u> ,	at that time, I lived in only one of them, namely, the pinnacled halls of great dispelling.
But, Ānanda, of those 84,000 <u>couches</u> ,	at that time, I used only one, namely, one made of gold, or of silver, or of ivory, or of hardwood. <sup>388</sup>
But, Ānanda, of those 84,000 <u>elephants</u> ,	at that time, I rode only one of them, namely, the king of elephants, named Uposatha [Sabbath]. [198]
But, Ānanda, of those 84,000 <u>horses</u> ,	at that time, I rode only one, namely, the king of horses, named Valāhaka [Thunder-cloud].
But, Ānanda, of those 84,000 <u>chariots</u> ,	at that time, I rode only one, namely, the chariot Veja,yanta [the victory machine]. <sup>389</sup>
But, Ānanda, of those 84,000 <u>women</u> ,	at that time, only one is present, <sup>390</sup> namely, a kshatriya woman or a velāmikā woman. <sup>391</sup>

<sup>384</sup> This passage is part of a stock in **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** parable (M 12.41/1:76), SD 2.24 & **Velāma S** (A 9.20.4/-4:393 f), SD 16.6. The phrase *ubhato,lohitaḥpadhāno*, alt tr “crimson rests at both ends (of the couch).” Cf **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1.15/1:7) & **Venāga S** (A 3.63.3b/1:181), SD 21.1, for a more detailed list.

<sup>385</sup> *Catur-āsīti dhenu,sahassāni ahesuṃ duha,sandanāni kaṃsūpadhāraṇāni*.

<sup>386</sup> The opulence listed here are fully recounted in **Go,maya S** (S 22.96) as being impermanent impermanent (S 22.96.30-42/3:145-147), SD 36.16, but it omits the closing para found here.

<sup>387</sup> Comy says that “his sons and daughters, and (their) slaves and people” (*avasesesu putta,dhūtādayo ceva dāsa,-manussā ca vasīṃsu*, SA 2:325).

<sup>388</sup> Note that this is a much shorter list than the previous [§2.14.2], ie minus the frills, as also in the next 3 items. Comy says that the other couches are used by his family members, “sons and so on” (*putt’ādīnam*, SA 2:325).

<sup>389</sup> Note that the “gem jewel” (*maṇi,ratana*), which follows in the previous stock listing, is omitted here.

<sup>390</sup> “Waited upon,” *paccupaṭṭhāti*.

But, Ānanda, of those 84,000 myriads of garments,

at that time, I wore only one suit, either of fine linen, or fine cotton, of fine silk, or of fine wool.

But, Ānanda, of those 84,000 dishes,

at that time, I ate only one measure of rice at most with a suitable amount of curry.<sup>392</sup>

**2.16** See, Ānanda, how these formations [conditioned things] are all gone, ceased, changed.<sup>393</sup> Indeed, Ānanda, so impermanent are formations! Indeed, Ānanda, so unlasting are formations! Indeed, Ānanda, so unreliable are formations!

It is enough, Ānanda, to feel revulsion towards all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them.<sup>394</sup>

**2.17** And now, Ānanda, I recall laying down my body here six times as a wheel-turner [a universal monarch], a just, true king [Dharma-rajah], conqueror of the four quarters, whose country is blessed with stability—a possessor of the 7 jewels.<sup>395</sup>

2.17.2 This is the *seventh* laying down of my body.<sup>396</sup>

2.17.3 Now, Ānanda, I see no place in the world, with its devas, [199] its Māras, its brahmas, its ascetics and brahmins, this generation with its rulers and people, wherein the Tathagata would lay down his eighth body.<sup>397</sup>

2.17.4 The Blessed One said this. Having said this, the well-farer [sugata], the teacher, said this.<sup>398</sup>

*Aniccā vata saṅkhārā  
uppāda,vaya,dhammino  
uppajjitvā nirujjhanti  
tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho 'ti*

Impermanent, alas, are all compounded things!  
It is their nature to rise and fall;  
Having arisen, they pass away—  
Happy it is when they are stilled!

— evaṃ —

<sup>391</sup> *Ekāy'eva sā itthī hoti, yā tena samayena paccupaṭṭhāti khattiyānī vā velāmikānī vā* (most MSS). **Go,maya S** (S 22.96) reads *khattiyānī vā velāmikā vā* (S 22.96/3:146). DPPN (Velāmikā) takes Khattiyānī and Velāmikā as alt names of the same woman. Buddhaghosa explains that a *velāmika* is a kshatriya of mixed marriage, ie, one born of a kshatriya father and a brahmin mother, or of a brahmin father and a kshatriya father (*khattiyassa vā brāhmaṇiyā, brāhmaṇassa vā khattiyāniyā kucchismim jātā*, SA 2:325). Bodhi has “a khattiya maiden or a *velāmika* maiden” (S:B 955). The next 3 items, on the houselords, the nobles and the milch cows [§2.14.2], are omitted here.

<sup>392</sup> *Yato nālik'odana, paramam bhuñjāmi tad upiyaṃ ca sūpeyyam*. The cpd *nālik'odana* = *nālika* (a *nāli* measure of boiled rice) + *odana* (“boiled rice”) (S 1:82; DhA 3:265, 4:17). Bodhi, foll Burlingame (“a pint-pot of rice,” DhA: B 3:77), tr *nālik'odana* as “a pint-pot measure of rice” (S:B 177 & 405 n231; cf DhA:B 3:76 f). Cf “bucket of (cooked) food” (*doṇa,pāka*): **Doṇa,pāka S** (S 3.13/1:81 f), SD 37.13. On the meaning of *thāli,pāka*, see §2.5 n.

<sup>393</sup> *Pass'ānanda, sabb'ete saṅkhārā atītā niruddhā vipariṇatā*.

<sup>394</sup> *Yāvañ c'idaṃ, ānanda, alam eva sabba,saṅkhāresu nibbinditum, alam virajjitum, alam vimuccitum*: **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17.2.16/2:198); **Anamatagga Saṃy** (S 15.1-20/2:178-193), **Go,maya S** (S 22.96/3:147), **Nakha,sikha S** (S 22.97/3:149); **Satta Suriya S** (A 7.62.4/4:100 etc); Nc:Be 136.

<sup>395</sup> See **Cakka,vattī Sīha.nāda S** (D 26.2a/3:59), SD 36.10.

<sup>396</sup> *Ayam sattamo sarīranikkhepo*. Here the Buddha is referring to himself, not to Mahā Sudassana. If this remark refers to Mahā Sudassana (his seventh death), it would imply that the Buddha does not die: see foll sentence which says that there will be no “eighth body” (*aṭṭhama sarīra*) [§2.17.3]: Both D:RD & D:W foll him, tr as if the seventh existence refers to Mahā Sudassana.

<sup>397</sup> *Na kho paṇāham, ānanda, taṃ padesaṃ samanupassāmi sa,devake loke sa,mārake sa,brahmake sas,samaṇa-brāhmaṇiyā pajāya sa,deva,manussāya yatha tathāgato aṭṭhamam sarīram nikkhipeyyā ti*.

<sup>398</sup> This well known stanza concludes **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17). **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16) records Sakra, the king of the gods, as uttering this popular ancient verse (D 16.6.10a/2:157), SD 9, said to be a remnant from the previous Buddha Kassapa's teaching that only he remembers. This famous stanza recurs at **D 16,6.10/2:157 = D 17,2.-17/2:199 = S v21/1.11/1:6, 609, S v609/6.15/1:158, S v776/9.6/1:200 = S 15.20/2:193 (Buddha) = J 95/1:392 = Tha 1159 = DhA 1.6/1:71; DA 3:748; MA 1:235.**



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